

Conceptual Frameworks for a Family Indicator Monitoring System

Laura Lippman
Kristin Moore, Lina Guzman, Jacinta Bronte

Child Trends
Washington, DC



Conceiving Families

- A family life cycle can be conceived of as stages of parenthood, including marriage or cohabitation, birth of the first child, the preschool period, children's entry into school and transitions through each level of school, and the transitions to the empty nest.
- Concept of a single, smooth family cycle describes a decreasing proportion of families as more children are raised outside of marriage, and changes in the order of the stages as experienced by parents (a birth before a marriage, for example).
- Indicators of family formation and family structure are well-measured...no need to elaborate, except to emphasize importance of transitions in that structure

Conceptual Frameworks for Developing Family Well-being Indicators

- Family Strengths Approach
- Healthy Couples
- Positive parent-child relationships
- Father Involvement
- Child, Family and Community Connections
- Child and adolescent outcomes



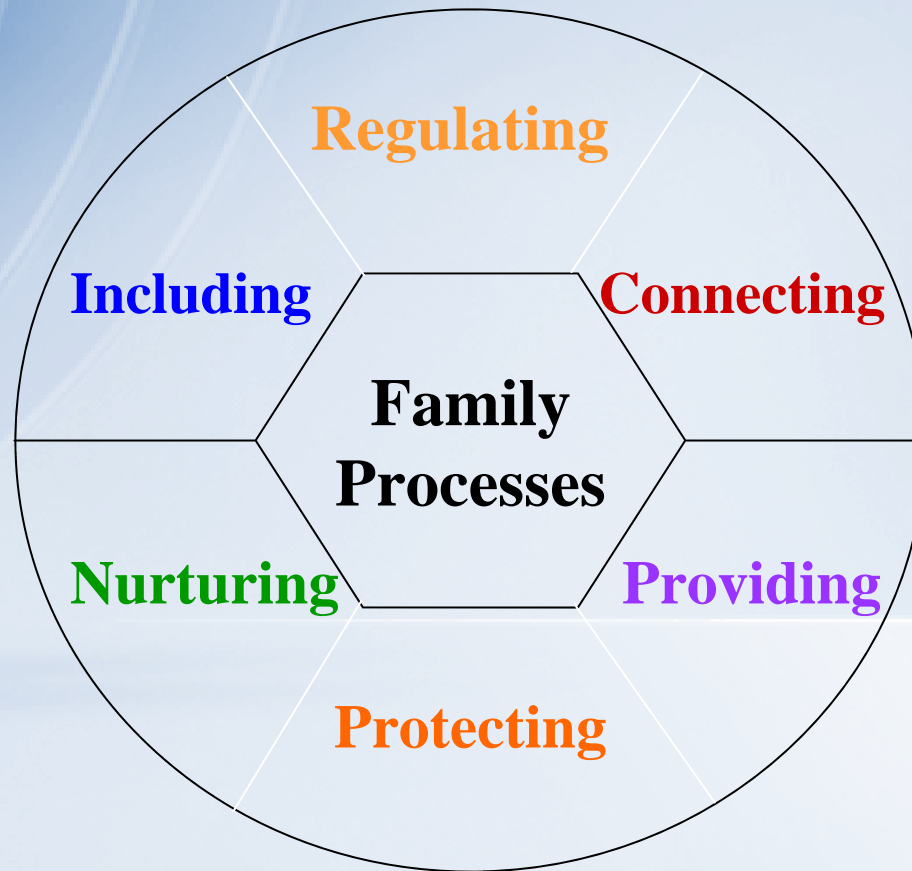
A family strengths perspective posits:

- Families have a reality beyond individuals, and beyond the dyads.
- Family strengths vary across the life cycle and for different cultural groups.
- Family strengths help families and individuals deal with stress, challenges and negative events.
- Child Trends seeks to measure family strengths and their prevalence in populations

Family strengths researchers have identified a number of strengths:

- Appreciation
- Communication
- Time together
- Encouragement of individual members
- Adaptability
- Clear roles
- Commitment to family
- Religiosity/spirituality
- Social connectedness


Here's a possible model of family processes:



- **Connection:** cohesion, warmth, secure attachment, intimacy
- **Inclusion:** who's in the family? what are their roles?
- **Regulation:** how family members influence other members and create a structured environment
- **Teaching/Socialization:** explaining, being a role model, providing feedback
- **Provisioning:** providing for the family
- **Protection:** keeping family members safe and healthy
- Measures need to address developmental periods of family life cycle

Conceiving Healthy Couples

- Satisfaction
 - Communication
 - Interaction/time together
 - Commitment to the couple
 - Intimacy/ emotional support
 - Conflict/conflict resolution


 - Fidelity
 - Commitment to the children
 - Duration and marital status
- 

Positive Parent-Child Relationships


- Closeness and warmth
- Supportiveness
- Communication, specific
- Spending time together
- Monitoring/limit setting
- Engagement in child's activities
- Rituals/celebrations/traditions



Father Involvement

- Mothers are poor reporters of father involvement, particularly non-residential dads
 - Length of time father lived with child
 - How far away does non-res Dad live?
 - Periods of separation from Dad
 - Reasons for no or little contact
 - Shared activities
 - Discipline/parenting style
 - Warmth/affection
 - Input into child-related decisions
 - Financial support
- 

Indicators of Child and Family Connection to Community

- Work, child care, and work/family stress
 - Parental involvement in school
 - Family and youth community service and engagement
 - Participation in religious services and activities
 - Youth connection and engagement in school
 - Clubs, afterschool activities, organizations
 - Social and familial networks: extent and distance
 - Neighborhood safety, trust, belonging
 - Physical and financial access to resources
- 

Positive Child and Youth Development

Expanding traditional measures of well-being in 3 domains to include positive behaviors, attitudes and relationships

1. Health and Safety

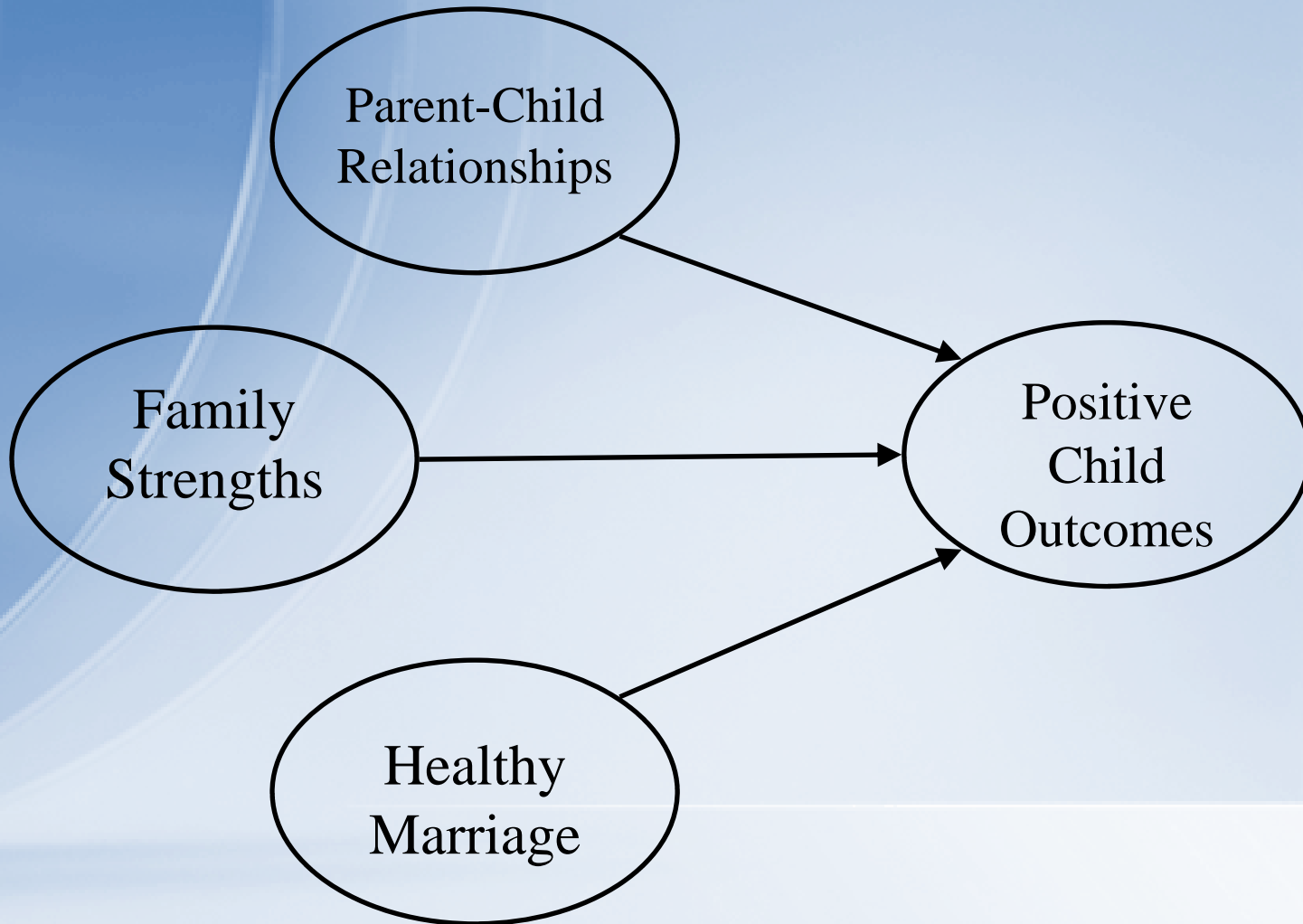
- nutrition, sleep, emotional safety (fears of bullying)

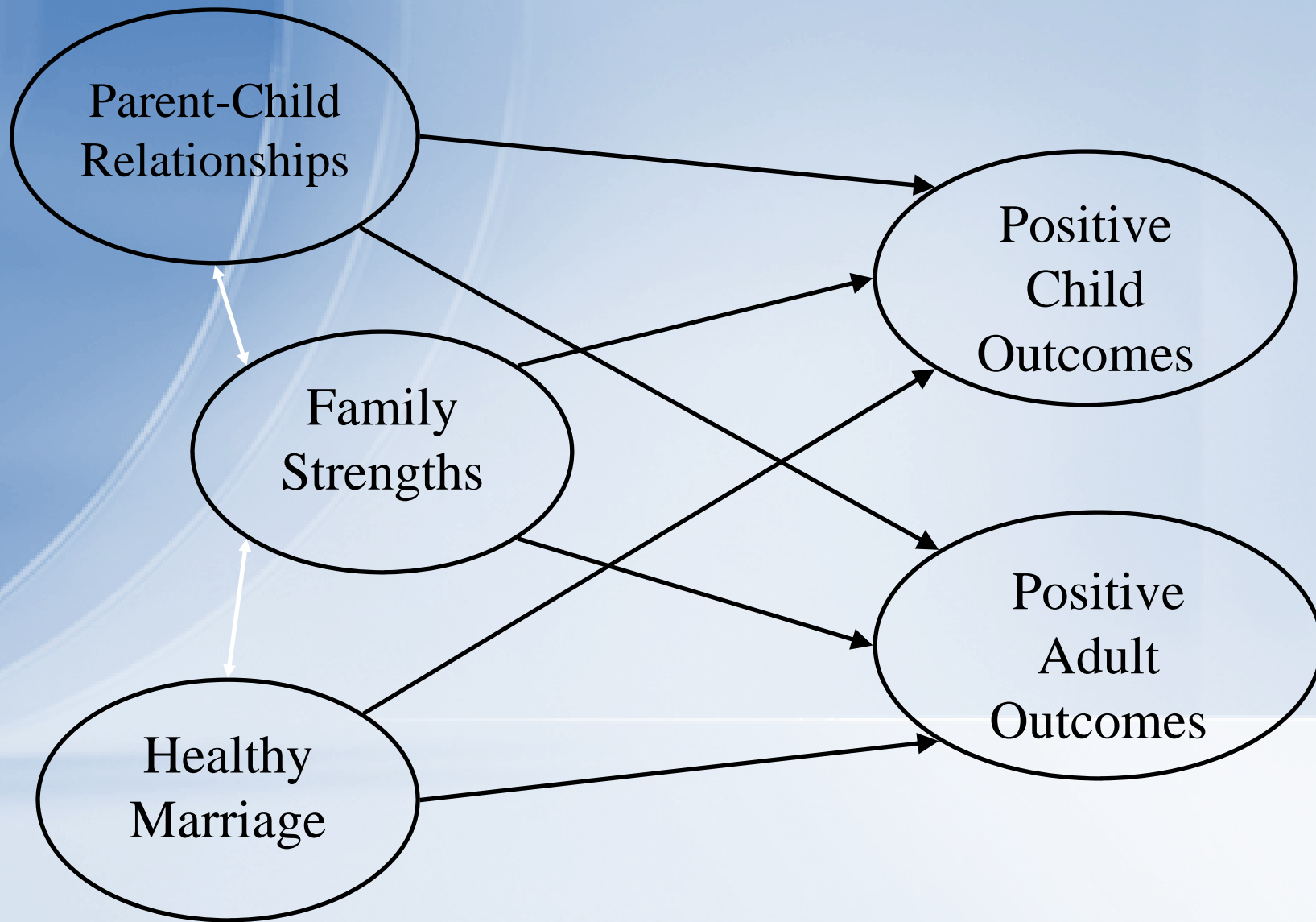
2. Education and Learning

- engagement, motivation, self-regulation

3. Social and Emotional well-being

- Relationships with parents, siblings, peers, other adults
- subjective life-satisfaction instead of suicide
- purpose, hope, spirituality
- social competence






Family vs. individual unit

- Measures of family interaction focus on whether families are childrearing successfully
- Interactions are from the perspective of the child or parent
- Dynamics of dyad cannot be generalized to other members or to the whole family
- Example: measuring family time— helps families shape a unique identity, helps individuals within the family unit feel a sense of belonging, access social support, and celebrate
- By having child as the unit of analysis, lost our ability to measure families and their connection to community
- In household surveys, need to at least identify if respondent is a parent and make families the unit of analysis
- Child outcomes are not independent of family well-being

Policy Considerations in Indicator Selection

- Separate indicators of context (such as poverty) from those of well-being of family members
 - What 5 things do you want to tell Australians about well-being in each domain?
 - What will you care about in 10 years?
 - How do you want to use the indicators? To describe trends? To monitor? To set goals? To evaluate programs or policies?
 - Envision family well-being, then what is needed to monitor to get there
- 

Policy considerations, cont'd

- Careful about setting targets: if too high, leads to discouragement
- What is the public framework? Programs don't work? Youth are lazy? Dads are irresponsible?
- Our public perception study: people ignore data to fit their frame
- Advantage to strength-based monitoring: positive trends can change perceptions, increase attendance and support for programs



Measurement Issues with Strengths-Based Indicators

- Strengths are more prevalent than deficits
- Cut-points on positive indicators can be arbitrary, since everyone has some
- Need consensus and research on how much is enough to tip outcome
- Upward bias in reporting of positive behaviors
- Indices can focus public attention, but mask trends in component indicators and domains, which is where policy is focused



**27 Years of
Research in the Service
of America's Children**

Child **TRENDS**®

www.childtrends.org/positiveindicators

www.childtrends.databank.org

llippman@childtrends.org