



WASHINGTON STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION



## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

2016

### BY THE NUMBERS

- The Strengthening Families Program has reached 5,228 families regionally.
- Facilitators have delivered more than 578 seven-week workshops, serving more than 7,600 youth statewide and regionally.
- Since 2001, WSU Extension faculty have trained more than 800 program facilitators.
- 51 counties in Washington, Oregon, and Nevada participate in Strengthening Families Programs.
- Washington is expected to save \$17 million due to this program's impacts to date.

*Reducing risky teen behavior by building family strengths – engaging communication, fun, and understanding.*

### ISSUE

Substance abuse is a serious and costly problem in Washington and nationwide. In a 2012 survey by the Washington Department of Social and Health Services, 23% of 10th graders in Washington said they had been drunk in the past 30 days, and one in five had driven while drinking.

Families are important sources of support and guidance for children, and the welfare of children often is tied to the strength of their families. Strong family relationships promote healthy development and protect against teen substance use.

While there is lots of good information for parents of younger children and for teenagers, there is very little information about parenting children from ages 10 to 14, who are transitioning from childhood to adolescence. This is a risky period, and it is difficult for parents to accommodate their children's growing need for autonomy while still monitoring their behavior and keeping them safe.

### RESPONSE

The WSU Extension Parenting team did a needs assessment and identified parents of children in this transitional developmental stage as underserved.

The award-winning *Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth Aged 10-14*, is a parent, youth, and family skills-building curriculum that focuses on strengthening parenting skills, building family strengths, and preventing teen substance abuse and other behavioral problems. The Strengthening Families Program (SFP) strives to improve parental nurturing and limit-setting skills, improve communication skills for parents and youth, and encourage youth pro-social skills development.

The program is seven weeks long. Each weekly session typically includes a group snack or meal, followed by separate workshops for parents and children, then family activities that encourage communication and closeness. Parents learn and rehearse best-practice parenting skills; youth learn peer-resistance skills, and how to understand and empathize with their parents' concerns.



## QUOTES

*"I've had to learn how to listen to my kids. I have to be trustworthy so my kids are able to share where, with whom, and what they'll be doing – not to control, but so they know that their well-being is important to me."*

*"I tell other parents that in this program you'll gain new tools and strategies... Together we can raise our children to be good. We can support them in their studies and help them be good citizens in the future."*

*"We'd never done a family meeting with our sons and daughters... It has helped us prepare for the future in case a problem occurs."*



Since 2001, Extension faculty have trained more than 800 program facilitators, enabling a statewide expansion of the program. From 2003 to 2016, program directors received reports on 578 Strengthening Families Programs that served a total of 5,228 families from 51 counties: 28 in Washington, 22 in Oregon, and 1 in Nevada.

Outcome evaluation reports are available for program sponsors such as school districts, counties, and agencies. Finally, through faculty-initiated grants, the program has provided hourly employment related to the program, for citizens in our communities.

## IMPACTS

Extensive [research in Iowa](#) on the Strengthening Families Program has shown that it is effective in delaying adolescents' use of alcohol and tobacco, reducing aggression, and improving parents' family management skills.

More than half of all parents who attended the Strengthening Families Program in Washington reported positive improvement on all family protective factors: rules, involvement, harmony, and communication. Similarly, more than half of the youth who attended the program reported improvement on attachment and family management.

A [benefit-cost analysis](#) conducted in 2008 by the Prevention Research Center at Pennsylvania State University showed that for each dollar spent on the program in Washington, the state saves \$3.89 in future costs for such things as arrest, incarceration, adjudication, victims' costs, and public assistance costs. This translates into a projected savings of \$3,160 per youth participating in the program, for a total savings of more than \$17 million in Washington and Oregon.

Benefits include reduced crime, reduced property loss, reduced health care costs, and increased labor market earnings.