Family resource centers are community-based organizations where any resident can access family support services and information. Their goal is to empower individuals and families to find help and services for themselves, and to connect neighbors to support each other. Family resource centers provide a one-stop shop for resources, serving as community hubs where any and all community members can access a variety of free services in a comfortable, non-judgmental space.

At the resource centers, families can get help from staff and volunteers to navigate services, and they can reach out to other families. Family resource centers empower families by allowing them to choose the services that fit their own needs and goals. Studies of family resource centers, including surveys of their members, suggest that the centers can be effective in connecting families to each other and to services, promoting families' financial situation and job security, and improving family relationships and parenting skills.

There is no single recipe for creating a family resource center. Instead, community organizations come together to create centers that meet the needs of their own neighborhoods and residents. This brief focuses on two different models: New Jersey's network of Family Success Centers, and the Family Access Center of Excellence of Boone County, Missouri.

New Jersey’s Network of Family Success Centers

The statewide network model of Family Success Centers (FSCs), launched in 2007, is unique to New Jersey. The New Jersey Department of Children and Families funds a network of 56 FSCs, at least one in each county. Different organizations – for example, United Way, schools, and community centers – house or oversee the FSCs in different cities. The facilities are usually homes, or at least home-like environments, that include living rooms and kitchens. A parent and community advisory board oversees design and delivery of services. FSCs follow a set of guiding principles and essential functions to help ensure consistent services are provided at each center. New Jersey's FSCs are designed to be:

- Collaborative, with both families and other community organizations that serve families
- Community-based
- Culturally responsive
- Family focused
- Flexible
- Strength-based
- Voluntary
- Welcoming
- Holistic
The FSCs are charged with eight essential functions, with the goal of creating a dynamic and adaptable organization:

- Engagement
- Active listening
- Advocacy
- Coordination
- Connecting leadership
- Skill building
- Continuous improvement

FSCs employ only three or four staff members and rely heavily on volunteers. Staff do not provide case management services. They welcome families to the center as part of an official process, and then engage with families to build relationships. There are no mandatory appointments or processes. Staff members provide information and referrals, connect families to resources, and advocate as needed and requested. FSC staff schedule a variety of classes, workshops, and groups to help build knowledge and strengths. Monthly programming includes parent education, parent and child activities, life skills, family health, housing services, and job information and training.

An important FSC goal is to build community connections. By functioning as a community hub, FSCs can address isolation, helping people build formal and informal connections and create their own peer support networks. FSCs also help break down the stigma around asking for help by normalizing the use of services.

Family Access Center of Excellence in Boone County, Missouri

In Missouri, the Family Access Center of Excellence of Boone County (FACE) operates a community center for families with children aged zero to 19. FACE started in 2012 with money from the Boone County Children's Services Fund, which comes from ¼-cent sales tax passed by county residents. FACE is open to all but with a focus on mental health services. Fifteen staff members work with the goal to empower families. Case managers meet with families using motivational interviewing techniques to complete a family systems assessment, address areas of strength and need, connect families with local service providers, and create an action plan with measurable goals. The objective is to create a partnership with children and families to help them better navigate service systems and meet their own goals.