

FIDELITY BENCHMARKS: SPF RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES AND PROGRAM STANDARDS

SFP is designed to reduce family environmental risk factors and improve protective factors with the ultimate objective of increasing personal resilience to drug use in high-risk youth. Research has demonstrated that the program is equally effective in reducing risk precursors for mental disorders and juvenile delinquency. SFP has been recommended as a best practice program by all federal agencies conducting expert reviews of individual programs, such as NIDA, CSAP, CMHS, DoEd Safe and Drug-free Schools, NIAAA, and OJJDP. For the purposes of assessing fidelity to the model three domains have been identified for this for this evaluation: 1) Community/Environmental Fidelity; 2) Population Fidelity; 3) Program Fidelity; 4) Staffing Fidelity; and, 5) Curriculum/Content Fidelity. The primary criteria for each of these domains are described as benchmarks in relation to established program standards.

COMMUNITY/ENVIRONMENTAL FIDELITY

Funding

The Strengthening Families Program budget provides for an itemized and general budget allowances. The recommended budget is based on a capacity of 12 families, with a recommendation for over-recruiting to maintain a functionally sized group of about 8 families. Expenses for conducting the program include site coordination, group leaders for delivering the program to families, food for a family meal, supplies, photocopying of manuals, in-session incentives, graduation incentives, graduation celebration, transportation, childcare and booster sessions. In-kind contributions are encouraged.

The budget is based on delivering the complete 14 sessions with fidelity of SFP (3-5), SFP (6-11) or SFP (12-16). Completion is usually at least one parent and child in a family attending 70% of the sessions (e.g., 10/14 sessions).

Community Context- The delivery of the program and fidelity measures are considered within the context of the host community, including population density and diversity. Variation is to be expected based on the interagency partnerships and mission of the agencies delivering the program. Variation is also expected based on the demographic make-up of the community (e.g., rural v. suburban v. seasonal v. urban) and community characteristics such as language differences and population age differences.

Safe and Welcoming Environment - Sites are selected based on accessibility and appropriateness for families to come together for a positive skills building program. The site must avoid stigmatizing or labeling attending families based on the local community's perception of the activities and persons that generally frequent the site. For example, in some communities the substance abuse treatment center is only frequented by persons who are diagnosed with substance abuse treatment disorders, which deters families from "being seen there." Some correctional facilities do not permit or are not considered appropriate for children. The site must be accessible by public transportation

in those communities where the families utilize such transportation and/or have parking available in convenient well-lit lots. The site must not only be safe, but must be perceived as safe, particularly for young and vulnerable children.

Site Facilities - The program recommends that the site have adequate facilities for separate rooms for the children and parents to meet for one hour and for the families to meet together for a meal and one hour of program curriculum. Additionally, there must be adequate space for childcare while parents are attending sessions. If the meal is to be prepared or stored on-site, there must be adequate facilities for food safety.

Transportation - Transportation to and from the program needs to be assured and coordinated within the resources of the community and program. This is particularly true since the families this program targets often do not have access to private transportation and/or cannot afford the gas to attend a program of this duration. Additionally, many of these families do not want and should not have to disclose that transportation is the barrier, particularly in the recruitment and early sessions of the program. Taking “hand outs” can be stigmatizing and shaming for some families. It is understood that in some communities public transportation does not exist; and in other communities public transportation may not be considered safe or accessible for families with young or multiple children. Transportation should not be a barrier to attending the program; but the “provision” of transportation should be measured within the community context of availability and community culture/expectations.

Community Calendar Congruity. The sessions are to be congruent with the local community calendar and events regularly attended by the target families (i.e., holidays, sporting activities, work schedules). Particularly, the sessions need to be coordinated with the host site (e.g., school vacations for school-sites; religious observations for faith-based sites; average length of stay for institutional settings). Changes in the calendar over the 14-session time span need to be anticipated and planned for.

TARGET POPULATION

Intervention Level - SFP was originally designed for selective or at-risk and high risk groups of children. This risk assessment has been extended to consider the family risk level, not just the children. The program has been delivered and tested and found successful with universal, selected, and indicated populations and has been tested with all three types of primary prevention approaches.

Age of Children - For the New Jersey parenting initiative, three SFP curriculums are funded. The programs target three age ranges of children:

- *SFP(3-5)*-targets children ages 3-5;
- *SFP (6-11)*- targets children age 6 -11;
- *SFP (12-16)*- targets children age 12-16.

Family Composition - The program requires that at least one child in a family and one parent participate in the three curriculum sessions. Parent is defined as the child’s

primary caregiver(s) and is interpreted in a broad context (e.g., foster parents, boyfriends, step-parents, adoptive parents, kinship care, etc.). The parent is an adult who “has accepted a long term responsibility for the care and safety of one or more children. Multiple caregivers are encouraged to attend the program. Multiple children in the age range are encouraged to attend the child/youth social skills and family skills sessions. Strategies can be used to involve deployed or absent parents unable to attend some or all of the sessions.

Level of Risk- SFP was originally designed for high-risk and at-risk families, and has been successfully implemented with universal populations. It is important to determine and consider the specific risk and protective factors of the eligible and attending families a level of risk is assessed to determine if the population is of high risk, at-risk or moderate risk. Level of risk has been found to impact the retention and outcomes and overall program fidelity.

Special Populations- Some implementations have additional eligibility requirements or target intervention in specific communities or with specific family characteristics. These are noted and it is considered if these contribute to the risk level of the families.

Cultural Competence- based on the specific social, economic, racial, faith-based, language, ethnicity, disability or familial background, it is noted to be assured that the context, environment, program, staffing and curriculum accommodate the needs of the attending families. The curriculum and evaluation materials are available in both Spanish and English and has been shown to be effective across a wide range of cultural populations (e.g., White, African- American, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, rural, urban and suburban).

Recruitment- The NJ SFP initiative targets recruitment of at-risk and high-risk families for participation in the program. The recruitment is the responsibility of the site and largely reliant on relationships, partnerships and outreach on the part of the site coordinator and host agency. This initiative promotes recruitment of families involved in substance abuse treatment, the criminal justice system, child welfare (DYFS) and Temporary Aid to Needy Families (WorkFirst NJ). Over-recruitment is encouraged in order to maintain required retention levels since drop-outs prior to and during the first session are common. **The relational ratio of referred to eligible to enrolled families provides determination of targeted capacity achievement rates.**

PROGRAM FIDELITY

Program Length/Dosage - The Strengthening Families Program is designed to be conducted in consecutive sessions, with each session lasting approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours (2 - 2 ½ hours when combined with the meal). The prescribed number of sessions is as follows:

SFP(3-5) – 14 sessions

SFP (6-11) - 14 sessions

SFP (12-16) - 14 sessions

The sessions are usually delivered once a week but may be delivered twice a week. Recent analysis of the data in the NIDA research study suggests that the results for reductions in antisocial behavior is not as good if the program doesn't run for 14 weeks. They are not to be delivered as "double sessions", meaning two at one time as it is important for families to practice skills between sessions before moving on to the next skill.

Meal - Generally a family-style meal is served to families as they arrive, making the activities 2 ½ hours in duration at each session. This meal is a time for group leaders to observe the families; for families to practice and check in regarding skill development; to reinforce family rituals; and, to remove a barrier to retention.

Skills Training Sessions: Following the general welcome, the first hour is spent with the parents and children meeting in their own respective groups. At the end of these groups, families are reunited and have a short break together. The second hour is spent in the Family Skills Training portion of the program. The Family Skills Training may last from 30-60 minutes depending on the activity and number of families. Depending on the number of participants, this group may be divided into smaller groups or may remain together.

Retention - SFP is a 14 session curriculum that allows for adequate time and dosage for families to learn, implement, practice and evaluate their progress in skill building, particularly in areas of family communication, positive discipline and family organization. Retention of families in a 14-session program today is very challenging (Kumpfer, 1991). SFP recommends meals, childcare, transportation, and culturally matched group leaders to increase retention. Originally, SFP required that families complete 12 of 14 sessions to graduate. However, in the last decade, we are happy to have families complete 10 of the 14 sessions. The average completion rate may be as low as 50% in the initial cycle, but is expected to approach or exceed 80% completion rates in subsequent cycles.

Attrition has been higher in the initial implementation and retention should increase in subsequent cycles. Across a number of prior evaluations, it was found that only about 50% of families graduate in the first group an agency runs as they are in training or this first group can be considered their pilot group. With more experience, over 4 to 5 groups,

the group leaders should become more effective at retaining families and end with about 85% of the families graduating (Aktan, Kumpfer, & Turner, 1995). Of course, this does vary with the ease of attendance and relationship of the clients to the staff and agency. Nationally, there are many cycles that have had 100% completion rates.

Incentives - Program incentives for participation increase retention and reinforce the program. Incentives that are tied to, build on and reinforce the curriculum are recommended. These include a family meal provided at each session, transportation, childcare, graduation certificates and completion rewards, and intermittent grab bags and supplies necessary for the family to complete the homework assignments and weekly curriculum activities. Many programs offer additional incentives, including weekly prizes, gas vouchers, gift cards, tickets to community events and even cash for attendance and participation. These vary by funding restraints, agency policy and community culture.

Child Care - Childcare is recommended to be provided at the site during the sessions. Since the program is promoting parental responsibility and family organization, the program needs to facilitate and assure age appropriate care for other children in the family, both younger and older than the participating children. Childcare provision or babysitting is to be in keeping with providing safety and fun for children not including in the skills training. Some sites provide the older children with the junior high school version of SFP (Kumpfer, Molgaard, & Spoth, 1997), which is a very effective program with one of the largest cost-benefit ratios of any drug prevention program—a \$9.60 savings for every dollar spend on it (Spoth, Gyll, & Day, 2002). Some sites hire some of the older youth to help in the babysitting with a partial salary. It is important that it meet local and host or partner agency regulations and guidelines, keeping in mind that childcare is only provided for 2 hours and the parents are onsite. Hence, it is possible to call this “babysitting” which often avoids the extra requirements of licensed childcare programs.

Follow-up Booster Sessions - Following the completion of the fourteen sessions, programs need to address follow-up and on-going support for families. This includes linkage when necessary to community services. This also includes any plan for a 6-month Follow-up or Booster Session. At these sessions the families come together again. It is an opportunity for the families to reflect on the programs impact on their lives, receive assistance in content areas unclear or problematic, to receive new educational or family skill building, participate in program evaluation and, moreover, reinforce the positive bonds they built with each other in the program. The format for these sessions is flexible and determined by the needs of the families, programs, evaluators and funding prerequisites.

STAFFING FIDELITY

Group Leaders - A total of four group leaders are recommended to deliver the program, with a group leader and co-group leader for the Parent Training group and another group leader and co-group leader for the Children's Skill Training group. During the Family Skills Training sessions, all four group leaders facilitate the session. It is strongly recommended that the two group leaders be gender balanced (both a man and a woman) and ethnically matched to the participants. If additional child social skills groups are held for other age groups or because of a large group size, it is necessary to have two group leaders in each skills training group.

Site Coordinator - A Site Coordinator is responsible for oversight, logistics, staff supervision and coordinating the program implementation and delivery. This includes being accessible to families between sessions, towards assuring retention. The site coordinator is a fifth staff person that is present at the sessions. They are NOT a group leader.

Training - The staff implementing SFP is to have completed the SFP two-day training. Trainings are conducted for each of the three curriculums. This training provides group leaders and site coordinators with training in program implementation, curriculum content and theory and working with at-risk and high-risk families. It is not necessary for staff to be credentialed in mental health, substance abuse treatment or prevention, although it may be helpful with some higher-risk populations.

Additional Staff - Additional staff includes childcare providers, food preparation, staff and van drives, as needed for program implementation. Childcare providers are recommended to provide on-site childcare and supervision of families' youth not participating in the curriculum due to age inappropriateness. In some communities staff includes food preparation, staff and van drivers.

CURRICULUM FIDELITY

Three Skills Training Curriculums- Curriculum fidelity is dependent on group leaders' delivering all prescribed sessions, assigning and reviewing homework and including the content areas specified for each session in sequence. Skills training methods for the parents', children's and family groups include lecture, demonstration, discussion, role playing, audio-visuallys, charts, homework assignments, practicum exercises, peer support, puppet shows, games, Child's Game, Parents' Game, supervised practice and video-taping practicum exercises. Actual delivery of the direct/verbatim curriculum will vary depending on the individual characteristics of the group leaders and the group members. The curriculum is spelled out in manuals complete with instructions for delivery, key lecture content, details of activities, lists of materials needed, homework assignments and handouts for copying and distribution. An overview of the Parent Training, Child Training and Family Training curriculum is indicated in the Table of Contents of each module.

Developmental Appropriateness- Sites are encouraged to use the SFP version that was originally designed for the age range of the families attending in order to assure developmental appropriateness of the curriculum. Developmental appropriateness is more important than the actual biological age of the child. For example, in many communities 11 year olds are in middle school and more appropriate for SFP(12-16) than SFP(6-11).

Modeling the Program Skills. Group leaders are expected to model the tenants of the program when interacting with the families, including at the family meal. Activities and skills are designed for and appropriate for both parents and children according to the developmental age of the children targeted in the age specifications of the curriculum.

Cultural and Local Adaptations. It is recommended that each local site tailor the program to accommodate cultural and community diversity. The program is designed to provide a framework and an outline of activities that will meet each program lessons objectives. The skills and activities are prescriptive and designed to be sequentially lead to the families (both children and parents) developing skills proven to result in improved family, child and parent behavioral and affective outcomes and reduced risk behaviors. (These outcomes are assessed in the outcome evaluation instruments). However, the group leaders are encouraged to make the program more culturally and locally appropriate by changing the names of people in the stories or puppet plays, using more appropriate ethnic stories for story telling, adding food, cultural and dances or games that the participants find reflect their traditional family values.

Creative and Interactive Delivery. The program may be adapted but not modified. Group leaders are encouraged not to read from the training manuals during the sessions, but rather to present the material in a well-thought out professional manner. They are encouraged to use personally developed flip charts or poster boards for visual outlines of their major points. This helps visual learners to learn better, personalizes the program (vs. power point presentations or overheads), and helps the Group Leaders not to read from their books. They look better prepared and respectful to the families with prepared material in advance of the group.

The program does not have to be implemented in a word-for-word manner. Examples of what to say are included in the manual as examples. Group leaders should personalize the delivery to fit their style, local language and examples.

The Group Leaders are also encouraged to “get creative” with their program materials by having concrete hand-on materials (e.g., art projects, puppets, hats, and props such as a flower pot with sun flower seeds for demonstrating following directions or a “tool kit” to demonstrate that the parents are learning new tools for their parenting tool box, etc.). In addition, they are asked to make the program more interactive with role plays, games, and exercises that will get the major points across, but in a manner that is culturally or locally sensitive and appropriate, while making it more fun for the families.