



## Strengthening Families Program

### Program Description

The Strengthening Families Program (SFP) brings families the skills to increase resilience and to reduce risk factors for substance abuse, depression, violence and aggression, delinquency, and school failure. Designed for high-risk children ages 6–17 and their parents, the program builds on protective factors by improving family relationships and parenting skills, and increasing youth's social and life skills.

### Target Audience

There are versions of the SFP program for families with children in elementary school, junior high school, and high school. A version for families with pre-schoolers is expected to be released in late 2005.

### Special Populations/Available Adaptations

SFP has been modified for African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, American Indian, and rural families, and has been evaluated in these populations. Canadian and Australian versions have also been tested. Although originally developed for children of substance abusing parents, SFP is effective and widely used with non-substance abusing parents in many settings: schools, churches, mental health centers, housing projects, homeless shelters, recreation centers, family centers, and drug courts. SFP modules for ages 6–11 and 10–14 are available in both English and Spanish.

### Program Components

Conducted in 14 two-hour sessions, the SFP curriculum includes three courses (Parent Skills Training, Children's Skills Training, and Family Life Skills Training). In the first hour of each session, parents and children participate in separate classes, each led by two co-leaders. Parents learn to increase desired behaviors in children by using attention and rewards, clear communication, effective discipline, substance use education, problem solving, and limit setting. Children learn effective communication, understanding feelings, coping with anger and criticism, stress management, social skills, problem solving, resisting peer pressure, consequences of substance use, and compliance with parental rules. During the second hour, families practice structured family activities, therapeutic child play, family meetings, communication skills, effective discipline, reinforcing positive behaviors in each other, and jointly planning family activities.

Incentives for attendance, positive participation, homework completion, and graduation are recommended. Family meals before each session, transportation, and child care all reduce barriers to participation. Booster sessions and parent-run family support groups for SFP graduates are encouraged.

### Program Costs

The program requires a part-time site coordinator and family recruiter and four trainers to deliver the program (two parent trainers and two children's trainers). The program costs per course vary depending on whether or not existing staff are employed as part of their regular job. One session for 10 families costs an estimated \$13,800 and two follow-up booster sessions are \$1,100 each. If the site coordinator is an internal staff member, the cost of SFP is \$11,500 and if

group leaders are also staff members, the cost is \$5,580. Expenses for childcare, food, supplies, incentives for homework completion, and handbook and manual duplication are included in these estimates.

### **Training & Technical Assistance**

Training of SFP group leaders by SFP-certified trainers and technical assistance for implementation, including evaluation, is coordinated by LutraGroup, SP (see contact information below). SFP group leader trainings are two days and include both instruction and participation by trainees and cover:

- Conceptual basis and origins of SFP
- Overall structure and mechanics of SFP
- Overview of the parent, child, and family curriculums
- Learning "Child's Game" and "Parent's Game"
- Simulation experience delivering sessions from parent, child, and family courses
- Recruiting and retaining families and decreasing attrition
- Administering evaluation instruments
- Dealing with ethical and legal problems; handling crisis; providing referrals
- Group facilitation skills

The group leaders training includes some technical assistance in implementation. Additional implementation assistance and evaluation services and assistance are available. A follow-up on-site visit once implementation has begun is often helpful in assuring fidelity and program effectiveness.

### **Training & Technical Assistance Costs**

Fees are \$3,250 for a two-day SFP group leader training for 35+ trainees, which includes one copy of the SFP master set of course materials on CD and limited site license to reproduce unlimited copies for the agency's own use. The training fee also includes some technical assistance in implementation. Two trainers' travel expenses, lodging, and per diem of \$35 are reimbursable in addition to the training fee.

### **Evaluation Results**

SFP has been evaluated by many independent investigators, using standardized clinical and prevention measurement instruments. Positive results from over 15 independent research replications demonstrate that the program improves family relationships, parenting skills, and improving youth's social and life skills, assets which help protect children. The program has been found to significantly reduce problem behaviors, delinquency, and alcohol and drug abuse in children; improve social competencies and school performance; and prevent depression in children and parents. These positive results were first demonstrated in the original NIDA research study from 1983 to 1987, employing a true experimental design with random assignment to four groups.

### **Recommended Evaluation Component**

A multi-method and multi-informant assessment strategy is used for the process and outcome evaluation and includes three primary interview instrument batteries measuring: 1) parent, 2) child, 3) therapist/trainer report to improve outcome validity. The process evaluation includes at least two forms: the Family Attendance Form, including the attendance, participation, and homework completion for each session for each participant, and 2) a Group Leader (trainer or therapist) Session Rating for each session that documents any changes that the leaders made

in the sessions, their satisfaction with the session, how well the families understood the material, and any suggestions for improvement.

### **Agency/Institution Recognition**

- Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP): Model Program
- Communities That Care- Developmental Research and Programs: Effective Program
- National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA): Effective Program
- Strengthening America's Families: Exemplary 1
- Title V (OJJDP): Exemplary Program

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