



Strengthening Families for Parents and Youth (SFPY) is a 9-week program for parents and other caregivers and youth, ages 12 – 16. It is a shortened, adapted version of the 14-week SFP 12-16 developed by Dr. Karol Kumpfer of the University of Utah. In a two-year research trial involving eight cohorts and 69 families in Toronto, Ontario, SFPY was found to produce desired positive outcomes for positive parenting, family functioning and youth resilience. The SFPY research project was made possible by funds from Health Canada and conducted by Parent Action on Drugs.

The following guidelines are presented to be helpful to agencies or coalitions interested in implementing the SFPY program. In conjunction with a training workshop for facilitators and delivery partners, these guidelines will help service providers maintain fidelity to the program and produce positive outcomes.

TARGET POPULATION

SFPY is appropriate for youth at risk and their families. The SFPY project included trials with mental health, addictions, neighbourhood centres, schools and other youth-serving agencies and included parents and youth who were at risk due to mental health and substance use concerns, high levels of family conflict and other environmental risk factors, such as family isolation, economic stress and living in vulnerable communities.

The SFPY program can accommodate families with single or multiple “parents” and single or multiple children within the 12 – 16 year age range. Parent is defined as the child’s primary caregiver(s) and is interpreted in an inclusive, broad context (e.g., foster parents, boyfriends, step parents, adoptive parents, grandparents or other forms of kinship care, etc.).

STAFFING

A total of four facilitators are required to deliver the program. The program works best having two co-group leaders for the parent session and another two co-group leaders for the youth sessions. All four leaders are involved in delivering and assisting with the family session. If possible, the facilitators as a group should reflect the ethno-cultural diversity of the families involved in the program.

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 facilitators and site coordinator should be experienced in working with at risk youth and parents and it is strongly recommended that they receive training in the program by attending a designated SFPY workshop.



SITES AND LOGISTICS

Sites are selected based on accessibility and appropriateness for families to come together in a welcoming environment.

In choosing a site it is important to keep in mind the flow of the program – beginning with a family meal in a room large enough and comfortable enough for all families and facilitators to eat together. When the curriculum actually begins, the youth, parents and children in childcare all need separate and adequate spaces. The family session requires enough room for the families to move about for many of the activities and sit down together for others.

SFPY is a 9-session curriculum that allows for adequate time for families to learn, implement, practice and evaluate their progress in skill building, particularly in areas of family communication, positive discipline and family organization. The SFPY program is structured to be delivered in 9 consecutive sessions, with each session lasting approximately two hours following the meal. Following the general welcome, the first 70 minute session is spent with the parents and youth meeting in their own respective groups. At the end of these groups, families are reunited and spend the next 50 minutes in the Family portion of the program. The younger children are cared for in a child-care setting for the duration of the two hour program.

RECRUITMENT

SFPY was designed to reduce a major barrier to recruitment by decreasing the time commitment involved from 14 to 9 weeks. Nonetheless, there are many challenges experienced by organizations in recruiting youth in the 12 -16 age category to both attending *any* program consistently and attending along with their parents. The most important strategy in the recruitment process is to look for multiple referral sources and work closely and directly with them to ensure they have a thorough understanding of the SFPY program and can present it in a realistic, engaging and non-judgmental way to potential families. Simply issuing an open invitation (e.g. delivering flyers and putting up posters) to attend the program will likely not produce the families necessary to begin the program delivery. Having a referring agent meet directly with the youth, as well as the parent, to reassure them of the active, empowering nature of the SFPY program will go a long way to getting youth to attend their first session of the program.

It is important to recruit 12 – 14 families for the initial session of the program. Experience shows that about 10 to 12 of these families will actually begin the program, and 8 to 10 families will remain with the program to the end. It is possible to have new families begin the program in the second week of the 9 week curriculum.



RETENTION

Retention of families in a 9-session program today can be very challenging. Providing a family meal of good quality and variety, childcare for children younger than the targeted age, and assistance with transportation are all essential strategies in supporting continuing attendance.

SFPY has also established guidelines for providing incentives or small gifts given to participants as acknowledgement of their efforts for attending. These incentives can be adjusted according to the program's budget and can be minor – but must be seen by the youth and parents as valuable. The incentives are more important in the early sessions of the program to overcome the initial misgivings of the participants; once they have established their social connections within the program and adjusted to the routine, external rewards become less necessary. Attrition is typically higher in the initial weeks of the program – experience has shown that after the fourth session commitment to attending increases greatly.

A phone call to each family during the week between sessions (typically made by the site coordinator) is highly recommended. This call provides a reminder and an opportunity for the family to discuss any possible barrier to attendance. If appropriate, a youth facilitator can connect with (call, text or email) a youth directly to provide additional support to youth to attend as well.

CURRICULUM DELIVERY

The SFPY Facilitator Manual provides facilitators with a complete discussion and activity guide, including suggested wording and additional information to give group leaders a good understanding of the concepts and skills they are delivering. All the discussion guides and activities have been tested many times with diverse audiences. In the Parents Session, in particular, it is important for facilitators to make sure they cover the key themes to meet the session objectives and, in particular, include the skills practice activity where indicated. Nonetheless, there is the ability to be flexible in how the materials are delivered to make the curriculum meaningful for the specific audience without deviating from the designated themes. The Youth Session especially allows for a flexible approach in order to make sure the activities selected are appropriate for the youth group and the youth are fully engaged.

Many of the activities require advance review and preparation in order to ensure that they are fully understood and can be delivered confidently. The SFPY Program Materials Preparation Guide which accompanies the Facilitator Manual provides a complete list of the materials necessary for each session activity.

Participation in a full-day designated training workshop by all program deliverers will ensure that they fully understand how to balance curriculum fidelity and flexibility to ensure the best results.



FUNDING

Expenses for conducting the program include site costs, coordinator and facilitators' fees, food for a family meal, program supplies, small incentives and prizes, transportation and childcare. If in-kind contributions are made – particularly for the provision of the site, coordination and facilitation – by participating agencies, the costs of the program are reduced greatly. Donations of food and prizes can also be sought.

EVALUATION

A combination of process evaluation and outcome evaluation is recommended. Program Report and Evaluation Templates are included as part of the SFPY package. Standardized assessment instruments (the SFP Parent Retrospective Pre/Posttest to be administered during or closely following the final session to all participating parents) is available as an alternative to measure outcomes with increased reliability and validity and provide information on program effectiveness in comparison to national norms. Use of the instrument, analysis and a program report can be obtained by contacting the LutraGroup (hwhiteside@lutrargroup.com).

TRAINING PACKAGE

Parent Action on Drugs has over fifteen years experience working with Strengthening Families programs and has provided workshops training hundreds of facilitators. As the lead developers of the adapted SFPY program, PAD has the expertise to prepare facilitators, coordinators and collaborating agencies with the information and skills practice necessary for the delivery of a successfully SFPY program. Program review, site visitation (where appropriate) and consultation are included as part of the Training Package provided by Parent Action on Drugs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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