

Format of the SAFE Program

Number of Sessions

The third edition of the SAFE Program consists of 18 workshops, organized into four categories:

- Information about disorders
- Skills for family members
- The experience of caring about someone living with serious mental illness (SMI)/PTSD
- Dealing with family, friends, and professionals

Each 90-minute session can stand alone, and the order of presentation of sessions can vary according to participants' needs. Further, all 18 sessions do not need to be presented, as facilitators can select topics relevant for their participants.

Frequency of Sessions

The series was originally created to be presented once per month. However, experience with the program suggests that the program should be offered on a more frequent basis (such as twice per month). Alternatively, the series can be offered as an 18-week class, or some session information can be condensed into a day-long workshop. The program is flexible to meet site-specific needs.

Participants

Any adult or mature adolescent who cares about someone living with serious mental illness or PTSD can attend the workshops. The individual does not have to be biologically related to the consumer (could be a friend, guardian, case manager, etc.).

The consumers are intentionally not included in the workshops. The program strives to foster a comfortable environment in which participants can freely share their struggles and concerns, without having to worry about possibly offending their loved ones.

Heterogeneity of Mental Illnesses

Family members attending the program have loved ones with quite different mental illnesses, including major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, PTSD, etc. With the exception of sessions on the specific mental illnesses (PTSD, depression/bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia), the workshops do not focus on a particular diagnostic category, so all participants can relate well to the discussions. In the workshops, family members learn that they have a great deal in common with each other, even if their loved ones and situations may be quite different.

The SAFE program does not focus on dementia or substance abuse. Families dealing with these issues should be given referrals for more specific treatment programs (e.g., Alanon, programs provided through the local Alzheimer's Association, etc.).

Facilitators

Each session is facilitated by at least two mental health professionals:

- A psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist, psychiatric nurse, or therapist conducts each workshop. One or two core staff should be present at every session, but you can have occasional guest speakers present the didactic material if desired to decrease burden on staff.
- A psychiatrist or pharmacist from the outpatient mental health clinic attends the last 10-15 minutes of each session to answer any questions about medications.
- A NAMI representative attends each session and provides information about the community organization.
- Psychology interns and psychiatry residents are encouraged to attend workshops and co-facilitate sessions. Medical students are also urged to observe sessions to gain some exposure to family services.
- The facility's recovery coordinator may also participate as his/her schedule allows.

Logistics

Participants are not obligated to attend every session; rather, they are encouraged to attend whichever workshops are of interest to them. Session topics are broad enough to allow discussion of generally applicable information in each workshop. Refreshments are served. There is no cost for the program. If possible, small self-care items (e.g., candles, journals) are given in each session to reinforce the importance of participants' taking good care of themselves.

A list of the necessary materials for each session is on the next page.

Flexibility

Although each session has a structured format and didactic material to cover, you should remain flexible in meeting the needs of participants. For example, if those in attendance express concerns or questions about a certain mental illness during the check-in process, you may wish to abbreviate the prepared material and devote some time to discussing the more immediate concerns.

Materials Needed For Each Session

SAFE Program

- Participant Notebooks (three-ring binder)
- “Welcome to the SAFE Program” ([Handout A](#), p. 13)
- “Resource List for Families” ([Handout B](#), p. 14)
- “SAFE Program Evaluation Form” ([Handout HH](#), p. 213)
- “SAFE Program Background Information Form” ([Handout II](#), p. 221)
- Flyers and pamphlets detailing upcoming workshops
- Family resource library (books and videotapes family members can borrow)
- Information on the state/local NAMI affiliate
- List of treatment options at your facility (e.g., list of available psychoeducational classes, groups and programs)
- Mental health service newsletter (if available)
- Pamphlets on specific mental illness
- Self-care items for participants (e.g., candle, gift certificate, journal)
- Pens
- Nametags
- Box of tissues
- Refreshments, plates, napkins (if possible)