

## Overview of Sessions

### Before the Session

1. As participants arrive, ask them to complete the “SAFE Program Background Information Form” (see [Handout II, p. 221](#)).
2. Encourage participants to enjoy the refreshments and socialize with other participants.

### During the Session

#### Introduction of Facilitators and Welcoming of Participants

1. Introduce facilitators.
2. Thank participants for coming, recognizing the many barriers that they may have had to overcome to attend (e.g., long drive, discouragement from their family members, guilt).
3. Distribute three-ring binder (Participant Notebook) to all new participants. Encourage participants to keep all handouts in this notebook and to bring it to each session.
4. Distribute [Handout A: “Welcome to the SAFE Program”](#)
  - Review program goals.
  - Review group guidelines, especially confidentiality.
5. Encourage participants to ask questions at any time during the workshop.
6. Emphasize to participants the importance of mutual respect.
7. Note that each participant has a unique situation
  - You have different relationships with your family member (may be a parent, child, sibling, friend, etc.).
  - Your family members have different mental health problems (e.g., schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder).
  - You may have been dealing with the situation for many years or for only a few months.
  - You may have daily interaction with the consumer or only occasional contact.
  - The level of functioning of your loved one may be quite high right now, or he/she may be in a crisis
  - Your ways of coping with your loved one may be quite different from the coping styles of those around you.

In spite of these differences, you share a great deal in common with each other. Much of the learning today may come from each other.

## Recognition of the Role of Family Members

Most services provided at the VA Medical Center are designed for veterans. However, this program was created specifically for you, those who care about someone with a mental illness or PTSD.

We want you to know that we value and appreciate your commitment to helping your loved one. We know that living with and/or caring about someone with a mental illness can be very challenging. Your presence here today signifies your desire to know more about how to help them. We applaud all that you do and genuinely thank you for your dedication.

## Introductions of Family Members/Check-In

1. Invite family members to introduce themselves, giving their names and the reason for attending today's session.
2. Participants tend to use this time to update other group members on their current struggles with their loved one. Gently suggest a 5-minute limit per person for the check-in. Do not force participants to share if they prefer to simply listen to the discussion.

## Didactic Presentation and Discussion

(See each session outline.)

Note: The length and amount of detail in each session outline vary across workshops. In longer outlines, you may choose to select certain sections relevant to the needs of your participants.

It's very important that you avoid reading the session content to participants. You can certainly have the manual in front of you, but you should be well versed in the session content so that you can facilitate the session easily. For example, participants may ask questions that you will answer in later parts of the session; feel free to skip to that section and then return to where you left off in the outline. Being responsive and flexible to participants' needs is very important.

Based on your rapport with the families, engage them in discussion about the material. Share anecdotes and interesting stories to keep participants involved in the discussion. Use of humor can also be a great strategy to maintain interest.

You should solicit questions, reactions and most comments repeatedly throughout the didactic presentation. Realize that it is more important to address issues raised by participants than to get through every item in the outline.

### Opportunity To Ask the Psychiatrist/Pharmacist Questions About Medication Issues

Give the psychiatrist/pharmacist the session outline several days in advance so he/she is familiar with the material covered in that workshop. Rather than presenting any formal lecture, he/she addresses any questions or concerns that participants may have.

### Brief Overview of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

Introduce the representative from the local NAMI, who describes the mission and activities of this organization. He/she also shares information and handouts about advocacy issues and community events pertaining to mental health.

### Review of Handouts in Participant Notebook

1. Review the various books, internet addresses, and community resources on the [Handout B: "Resource List for Families."](#)
2. Review the SAFE Program pamphlet listing dates and topics of future workshops and explain that the series has been designed so that participants can either attend all sessions or attend only those of particular interest.
3. Briefly describe the available mental health treatment programs and provide relevant handouts.
4. Review the specific mental health disorders informational pamphlets.

### Resource Library

1. Describe available resources (books, videos, etc.) that participants may check out and explain the checkout process.
2. Distribute a list of available books and videotapes that participants may enjoy.

### Program Evaluation

Express your commitment to improve this series to better meet participants' needs. Ask participants to complete the brief evaluation form regarding the session ([see Handout HH, p. 213](#)).

## Closing

1. Solicit reactions to today's workshop.
2. Re-emphasize the importance of self-care.
3. Distribute self-care items to participants as a symbol of your appreciation for their commitment to the veterans. Self-care items may include candles, bookmarks, small gift certificates to local restaurants, movie theater tickets, movie rental certificates, crossword puzzle books, journals, etc.
4. Remind participants of next month's topic and date.
5. Note availability of short time after workshop for individual questions.
6. Thank each participant for coming.

## **Welcome to the SAFE Program**

### **Support And Family Education, Mental Health Facts for Families**

We're glad that you're here.  
We hope this will be a helpful program for you.

#### **Goals:**

These workshops are designed to support family members who have a loved one with a mental illness. We hope that these programs will provide opportunities to:

- Learn more about the causes, symptoms, and treatments of mental illness.
- Ask doctors questions in a relaxed environment.
- Recognize early warning signs of problems so you can access services earlier.
- Learn more about what is available at the VA Medical Center and in the community for your loved one and yourself.
- Provide and receive support from other family members who are in similar situations.
- Learn how to take better care of yourself.

#### **Guidelines:**

1. We ask that you promise to respect each other's confidentiality by refraining from discussing personal information shared at this workshop. Please feel free to share handouts and educational information, but do not talk about specific participants.
2. Please be attentive, supportive listeners so that everyone can feel heard and respected.
3. Ask any questions at any time. We are here to educate and support you.

**Thank you for coming!**  
**We hope to see you next class!**