

## **SAFE Children**

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Risk Factors | Interventions by Domain | Key Program Approaches | Outcomes | Evaluation Design  
Delivery Specifications | Intended Setting | Fidelity | Barriers and Problems | Personnel | Education  
Personnel Training | Cost | Intended Age Group | Intended Population | Gender Focus  
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*Program developers or their agents provided the Model Program information below.*

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### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION**

SAFE Children is a community- and school-based program that helps families manage educational and child development in communities where children are at high risk for substance abuse and other problem behaviors. The program aims to help children 5 to 6 years old make the transition into elementary school, have a successful first year, and set a strong base for the future. Families with children entering first grade and living in inner-city, high-risk neighborhoods are enrolled in a 20-week family program, and children receive twice-weekly individual tutoring sessions that are heavily phonics-based.

### **PROGRAM BACKGROUND**

The SAFE Children program grew out of a set of previously established relationships between the University of Illinois at Chicago and various Chicago Public Schools, which began with the Chicago Youth Development Study. Schools that had participated in this longitudinal study were invited to participate in the SAFE Children intervention study. The program was developed based on results from a prior similar intervention study, the Metropolitan Area Child Study, which also applied the developmental-ecological model.

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### **RECOGNITION**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Model Program

U.S. Department of Education: Exemplary Program

Drug Strategies, Inc.: Rated "A" Program



## **INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE CLASSIFICATION (IOM)**

### **UNIVERSAL**

This program was developed for universal audiences.

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### **INTERVENTION TYPE**

#### **COMMUNITY-BASED, SCHOOL-BASED**

SAFE is a community- and school-based program.

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### **CONTENT FOCUS**

#### **ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE, DOES NOT SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS ANY SUBSTANCES**

##### **ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

This program provides strategies for both children and their families designed to improve the child's school performance, through tutoring and enhancing the family's capacity to support the child in a successful school experience.

##### **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE**

The program evaluated the social competence and peer relations of the child, the parental investment in the child's well-being and development, and the social competence and self-control of the child.

##### **PARENTS AS AN ADJUNCT STRATEGY**

Parents participate in weekly family group meetings to build support networks among parents, develop parenting skills, give parents a better understanding of schools and how they work, and ensure that children have the skills to master basic reading.

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### **PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

#### **INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY**

##### **INDIVIDUAL**

- Child self-control
- Social competence skills
- Academic achievement skills (particularly early basic reading skills)
- Interest in academic achievement
- Bonding to school

## FAMILY

- Strong positive family relationship characteristics
- Effective family management practices
- Parental involvement with academic performance
- Sustained parental involvement with school
- Involvement with supportive others outside the family

## SCHOOL

- High academic achievement expectations
- Inviting attitude toward parents

## COMMUNITY

- Support among neighbors
  - Protection of children from neighborhood risks
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## **RISK FACTORS**

### INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY, COMMUNITY

#### INDIVIDUAL

- Low self-esteem
- Poor early reading skills

#### FAMILY

- Problematic family communication
- Low understanding of schools

#### COMMUNITY

- High rates of violence and substance abuse
  - Paucity of community resources and supports
  - Isolation of parents from each other
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## **INTERVENTIONS BY DOMAIN**

### INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY

#### INDIVIDUAL

- Designed to be culturally sensitive
- Builds social and personal skills

## FAMILY

- Helps develop bonds among parents in the program
- Develops parenting skills
- Task-oriented family sessions improve family and social interaction

## SCHOOL

- Helps youth retain skills through booster sessions (tutoring, homework assistance)
- Involves parents in school-based approaches

## COMMUNITY

- Education to alter perceptions of societal norms and expectations regarding school/academic achievement

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## KEY PROGRAM APPROACHES

### PARENT TRAINING, SCHOOL/COMMUNITY COLLABORATION, SKILL DEVELOPMENT, OTHER: TUTORING

The program is manualized to provide guidance on implementation and has two primary components: a family group intervention and tutoring for the child.

#### PARENT TRAINING

The program provides 20 weekly multiple-family group meetings (four to six families per group) to address issues of parenting, family relations, and parental involvement and investment in their children's schooling.

#### SCHOOL/COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

A key focus of the family group meetings and the tutoring is to strengthen the relationship between the families and the schools. The tutoring component complements the school's reading initiatives, and the program works with the reading coordinator and first grade teachers in the schools to maximize the consistency of the tutoring with the primary work in the classroom.

#### SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The program focuses on enhancing parenting skills in the families and reading skills in the children.

#### OTHER: TUTORING

The participating first grade children receive intensive one-on-one tutoring in the phonics-based program that teaches the basic skills of reading, and participate in a literacy education component to increase their opportunities to apply and reinforce reading skills. The literacy component involves tutors reading to children and giving children books. The 30-minute tutoring session is divided into three 10-minute segments that address phonics, writing and reading activities, and reading to the child.

## HOW IT WORKS:

SAFE Children is a manualized program, but the materials are not sufficient to implement the program and should be used only in consultation with the program developers. The SAFE Children program has two components:

1) A 20-week family group curriculum that focuses on:

- Enhancing parent and child understanding of and involvement with the school
- Strengthening family relationships
- Supporting successful parenting practices
- Creating a supportive and normative social network

Sessions include dissemination of information, group discussion, family activities, and assignment of between-session activities.

2) Twice-weekly individual tutoring sessions that are heavily phonics-based. Each 30-minute session includes direct instruction, sound and word activities, and time for reading practice.

The programs and measures used in the SAFE Children project are offered in Spanish and English. Family group meetings are typically held in rented space in neighborhood locations that are easily accessible to families (e.g., public facilities, park buildings, churches)

- **Weekly Family Group** meetings—Groups of four to six families meet at convenient community sites for 20 weekly 90-minute sessions led by Family Group Leaders. Leaders conduct the SAFE Children sessions following the curriculum and underlying principles and processes of the intervention.
- **Tutoring sessions**—Each child meets with a tutor for two or three 20- to 30-minute sessions, weekly, at times convenient for families. Tutoring most often takes place on school premises, but other locations (e.g., family homes) are sometimes used. Tutors can be trained undergraduate students. Tutors work closely with school reading coordinators and first grade teachers to maximize the consistency between program tutoring and the primary classroom work.

An initial consultation, consisting of a 2-hour phone conversation and 1-day site visit, is necessary to assess the fit of the program to the school, the organizational framework, and the infrastructure required for proper implementation.

Telephone consultation is available and recommended for 1 to 2 hours each week during startup and every other week during the first year of program operation. Regular involvement with the developers is expected, and onsite visits can also enhance the quality of implementation. A complete package of reproducible program materials, including a family intervention manual, tutoring components, and an evaluation manual with measures, is included in program costs.

## **OUTCOMES**

### **IMPROVEMENTS IN BEHAVIORS RELATED TO PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

#### **Improvements in behaviors related to protective factors**

- Greater improvement in academic achievement than control group.
- Reading scores approximated the national average and were 4 months ahead of control group.
- Parents maintained enthusiasm for and involvement in children's school life.
- Children's social competence increased as the result of improved family emotional cohesion.
- Parents used more effective parenting practices and reported greater use of home rules and family organization strategies.

Children in the program showed steeper growth in academic achievement over a 24-month period than did children in the control group. By followup at the beginning of second grade, the reading scores of children in the intervention group were at a level approximate to the national average and 4 months ahead of those in the control group. At followup, parents in the program were still maintaining their involvement in their children's school life instead of showing the typical pattern of a severe dropoff.

#### **OTHER TYPES OF OUTCOMES:**

- Higher rates of appropriate grade-level achievement and school completion
- Improved child self-regulation skills and social competence in adolescence
- Decreased substance use in adolescence
- Decreased delinquency and violence during adolescence

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## **EVALUATION DESIGN**

The SAFE Children project was evaluated in a fully randomized trial across eight schools in Chicago inner-city neighborhoods. Data were obtained through five individual interviews conducted with the primary caregiver(s) and target child over the course of a 24-month period (two pretests, one midtest, posttest, and followup). Data were also obtained through teacher assessments and school records. Following the first wave of interviews, families were randomly assigned to treatment or control.

Analyses relied on multiple waves of assessment to accurately model development of children within these high-risk communities. The effects of the intervention are seen as variations in the children's development pattern pertaining to academic achievement, substance abuse, and delinquency that otherwise would not have been seen.

## **DELIVERY SPECIFICATIONS**

5–24 WEEKS

Amount of time required to deliver the program and obtain documented outcomes:

The family group meetings are held weekly for 20 weeks, with each session lasting 2 to 2.5 hours.

The tutoring is conducted two to three times a week for approximately 30 sessions; each session lasts 30 minutes.

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## **INTENDED SETTING**

URBAN

This program was developed for high-risk urban communities.

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## **FIDELITY**

Components that must be included in order to achieve the same outcomes cited by the developer:

**Program site coordinator:** a person with several years of experience working with families and in school settings to oversee the program and supervise the other staff.

**Family group leaders:** persons with previous professional experience with urban, minority families and who are trained to use the intervention.

**Trained tutors:** college students, advanced high school students, or community volunteers who are trained in the specific reading techniques used in the program.

**Trained intervention leaders:** these individuals ensure that the program is implemented with fidelity to the original model.

**Ongoing consultation:** program leaders must work with the developers to assess organizational needs and ensure that the intervention and the evaluation are going as planned.

Twenty weekly family group meetings conducted according to the manual guidelines.

Tutoring sessions conducted according to the manual guidelines.

Establishment and maintenance of strong relationships with schools to ensure respect for their competing demands, flexibility in scheduling, and appreciation for school efforts.

## **PERSONNEL**

FULL TIME, PART TIME, PAID, VOLUNTEER

Types of positions needed to successfully implement this Model Program:

Program Site Coordinator to oversee the program and supervise the other staff.

Family Group Leaders to lead the family group meetings.

Trained Tutors to work with the children.

Trained Intervention Leaders to ensure that the program is implemented with fidelity to the original model.

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## **EDUCATION**

HIGH SCHOOL, UNDERGRADUATE, SPECIAL SKILLS

Program coordinator: several years of experience working with families and in school settings.

Family group leaders: previous professional experience with urban, minority families and training to use the intervention.

Trained tutors: college students, advanced high school students, or community volunteers trained in the specific reading techniques used in the program.

Intervention leader: training in the implementation of the intervention.

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## **PERSONNEL TRAINING**

Required personnel training, including the type, location, length, and any other requirements:

An initial consultation, consisting of a 2-hour phone conversation and 1-day site visit, is necessary to assess the fit of the program to the school, the organizational framework, and the infrastructure required for proper implementation. Assuming there is support and infrastructure to implement the program effectively, a 3-day site visit is required for training and organizational and personnel assessment. Up to 5 administrative staff and 10 program delivery staff can be trained during each session.

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## **COST (estimated in U.S. dollars)**

Cost considerations for implementing this program as recommended by the developer:

Cost and budget information under development.

Products:

Family Intervention Manual

Tutoring Manual

## **INTENDED AGE GROUP**

CHILDHOOD (5–11)

This program is for children, 5 and 6 years old, who are entering first grade and their families.

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## **INTENDED POPULATION**

AFRICAN AMERICAN, HISPANIC/LATINO

The program has been evaluated with African American and Hispanic/Latino families and children.

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## **GENDER FOCUS**

BOTH GENDERS

This program was developed for both genders.

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## **REPLICATION INFORMATION**

NO INFORMATION PROVIDED

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## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

### **ABOUT THE DEVELOPERS**

The developers are Patrick Tolan, Ph.D., Deborah Gorman-Smith, Ph.D., and David Henry, Ph.D., from the Families and Communities Research Group in the Institute for Juvenile Research, Department of Psychiatry, at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

### **FOR MATERIALS AND RELATED CONSULTATION, CONTACT**

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