

*Effective Substance Abuse and
Mental Health Programs
for Every Community*

SAFE Children

Schools and Families Educating (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. It is based on a developmental-ecological model that looks at how neighborhood and school characteristics affect children and families, children's school achievement, their social adjustment, and their maturation.

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 that aims to—

- Build support networks among parents
- Develop parenting skills and knowledge of child development
- Give parents a better understanding of schools and how they work
- Ensure that children have the skills to master basic reading skills

INTENDED POPULATION

The SAFE Children program has been evaluated with African American and Hispanic/Latino families whose children are entering first grade and who live in high-risk urban communities. The majority of families had a family income below \$20,000 per year and had five or more people living in the household.

Proven Results

- 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
- Parents used more effective parenting practices
- Parents report greater use of home rules and family organization strategies
- Children's social competence increased as the result of improved family "emotional cohesion"

INTERVENTION

Universal*

Selective

Indicated

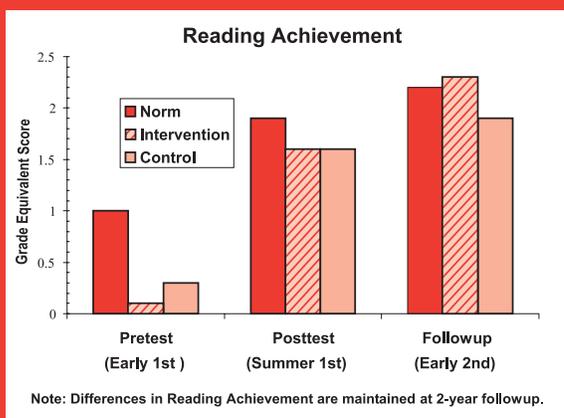
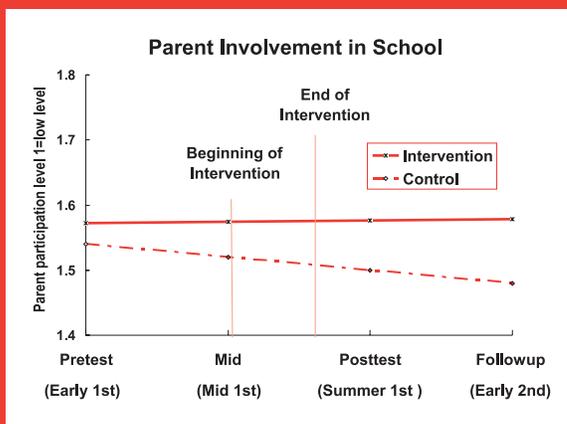
**Created for high-risk neighborhoods.*



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
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OUTCOMES

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 drop-off.



BENEFITS

- 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

HOW IT WORKS

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).

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

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. Successful implementation of the SAFE Children program involves the following staff, practices, and attitudes:

- **Program Site Coordinator**—This position requires someone with several years of experience working with families and in school settings. This person oversees the day-to-day program management and supervises the Family Group Leaders and Tutors. This individual also acts as the management liaison for the ongoing consultation (see below).
- **Family Group Leaders**—In addition to training in the intervention, candidates for this position must have previous professional experience with urban, ethnic minority families and demonstrate comfort

working within urban communities. Group leaders must also have the engagement skills needed to recruit families. Group leaders attend weekly staff meetings and weekly individual supervision under the guidance of the Program Site Coordinator.

- **Trained Tutors**—These individuals must be trained in the specific reading techniques used in the program. College students, advanced high school students, or community volunteers can fill these positions. However, they must commit to stay and work a full year meeting two to three times a week with each child they are assigned.
- **Trained Intervention Leaders**—They ensure that SAFE Children is implemented in a manner that follows the curriculum and also the underlying principles and processes of the intervention, so that the program is implemented in the same way that it was tested.
- **Ongoing consultation**—Program leaders must work with the developers to assess organizational needs and ensure that the intervention and the evaluation of the intervention are going as planned.
- **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.
- **Establish and maintain strong relationships**—Program leaders must respect participating schools' competing demands, show flexibility in details such as scheduling, and show appreciation of the efforts of all school personnel. Strong, respectful, collaborative, and culturally considerate relationships must be established and maintained with participating families. Staff must exhibit continual consideration of the unique impact of the social ecology of poor, inner-city neighborhoods.

Training and Materials

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.

HERE'S PROOF PREVENTION WORKS

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.

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.

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.

PROGRAM DEVELOPERS

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All three developers are part of the Families and Communities Research Group in the Institute for Juvenile Research, Department of Psychiatry, at the University of Illinois at Chicago. As a team, they have worked with the Chicago Public Schools for the past 11 years to understand development, risk, and prevention possibilities in urban, poor communities.

Dr. Tolan is director of the Institute for Juvenile Research and a professor in the Department of Psychiatry. Dr. Gorman-Smith is associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry, and Dr. Henry is assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry.

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RECOGNITION

Model Program—Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services