

Edition 11 – 4

Fall 2009

Research Précis

Best Practices: Safe and Drug-free Schools and Communities

Creating a better tomorrow...

Title: Brief Strategic Family Therapy

Overview:

Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT) is a short-term, problem-focused clinical intervention that employs a family systems framework to address family members' behaviors, interactions, and protective and risk factors related to the child's symptoms and substance abuse, reducing drug use and associated youth behavior problems.

Target: Children and adolescents ages 6-17 that display or are at-risk for behavior and substance abuse problems

Extent/Duration of Program: The program consists of 12-16 sessions, each 60-90 minutes long, over a period of three to four months (perhaps more in crises). Startup takes one year, including hiring and training counselors, developing community referral resources, and recruiting/screening families.

Program Costs:

- BSFT abridged and unabridged training manual, available free with training.
- Training costs \$10,000 plus, based on local considerations, and consists of English or Spanish counselor training in clinical skills and family systems therapy in four phases: presentations on content, videotapes on diagnosing family processes and interactions, videotapes on delivery of family counseling interventions, and live or videotaped supervision of trainee's family counseling.

For further information, or to order:

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Principles/Approaches/Components: *Brief Strategic Family Therapy* is based on the premise that each family has unique characteristics that emerge when members interact and that this family system influences all members. Presumably, targeting family protective and risk factors can reduce problem behavior among adolescents, including substance use. Parent and family relationships are the key. By changing how family members act toward each other, each member's competence and ability to impede undesired behaviors increases. The therapeutic process utilizes joining (forming a family alliance), diagnosis (identifying patterns of interaction that encourage poor youth behavior), and restructuring (changing family interactions related to problem behaviors). The program addresses individuals through life and social skills training, families through home visits and interaction skills such as communication, parents through education and skills training, and peer relations through peer-resistance education.

Evidence-based Effectiveness: Three studies (three Hispanic and one African American) focusing on increasing family participation in therapy have yielded a variety of positive findings. These include decreases in substance use (75% reduction in marijuana use), reductions in

negative behaviors and increases in positive behaviors (42% improvement in conduct problems and 58% reduction in association with antisocial peers), and improvement in positive attitudes (self-concept, self-control, and family functioning). In one evaluation of BSFT, adolescents showed significant reductions in conduct disorder and socialized aggression after treatment, whereas adolescents in group therapy showed no significant changes. Other outcomes included retention of over 75% of families in the program, increased participation in family therapy, increased parental involvement and development of effective parenting skills (especially related to management of children's behavior), and improved family cohesiveness, communication, collaboration and problem solving, conflict resolution, and child/family bonding.

Safe and Drug-free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) connections:

A.iv - Activities that teach students to recognize social and peer pressure to use drugs illegally and the skills for resisting illegal drug use.

B - Activities that involve families, community sectors, and a variety of drug and violence prevention providers in setting clear expectations against violence and illegal use of drugs and appropriate consequences for violence and illegal use of drugs.

E.x - Counseling, mentoring, referral services, and other student assistance practices and programs, including assistance provided by qualified school-based mental health services providers and the training of teachers by school-based mental health services providers in appropriate identification and intervention techniques for students at risk of violent behavior and illegal use of drugs.

National Standards connections:

Grades 1 through 12

Health Education Standard 4 – Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

Health Education Standard 7 – Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.

National Health Education Standards, Second Edition: Achieving Excellence. American Cancer Society, 2007.

Counseling: Personal and Social Development Standard A: Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

ASCA National Standards for Students. American School Counselor Association, 2004.

Recognition and additional reports:

The following organizations/institutions have recognized *Brief Strategic Family Therapy*. The organizations are in alphabetical order and the recognition status is in parentheses.

American Youth Policy Forum (Effective Program)

Blueprints for Violence Prevention (Promising Program)

Communities That Care—Developmental Research and Programs (Effective Program)

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Promising Program)

SAMHSA (Model Program)

Strengthening America's Families (Exemplary Program)

GENERAL NOTES: The intent of the above synthesis and correlations is to assist teachers and school administrators dedicated to using best practices to reduce violence and substance abuse among students. To our knowledge, the information was current upon publication. However, details pertaining to status of program recognition, research and findings, costs, and contact information are subject to change.

Correlations to the Safe and Drug-free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) federally approved activities and to national education standards have been limited in depth (“standard” level only) and breadth (number of standards and subjects) due to the encompassing nature of many programs that typically qualify as model or exemplary. The correlations listed should not be viewed as exhaustive.

Designed Instruction’s effective SDFS program research series was funded by the United States Department of Education. For information on other effective programs for promoting safe and drug-free schools and communities, visit www.designedinstruction.com/learningleads/effective-sdfs-programs.html

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