



# **Strengthening Families Programme Information Guide**

**(12 – 16 years)**

**Information Guide for agencies  
funded by Le Chéile delivering the  
Strengthening Families Programme**

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# Le Chéile Mentoring and Youth Justice Support Services – Strengthening Families Programme - Information Guide

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## Introduction and Welcome Note

This revised Information Guide has been developed to aid Steering Committees, Site Coordinators and Facilitators involved in the planning, delivering and evaluation of the Strengthening Families Programme (SFP 12-16 years) funded through Le Chéile Mentoring and Youth Justice Support Services.

This Information Guide is intended as a resource for practitioners to use in addition to the existing Strengthening Families Programme (12-16 years) 2006 cd-rom materials/ 2010 Revised Version as available from the US Developers of the programme.

The topics in this Information Guide have been placed into three main categories:

- Planning of a SFP Programme
- Delivery of a SFP Programme
- Evaluation of a SFP Programme

We hope this Information Guide will enable you to plan, deliver and evaluate an effective programme in your area and give your clients, both parents and teens, the best possible training in improved family skills.

In writing this Information Guide, please note that Le Chéile have taken information directly from the SFP National Council of Ireland, the Lutra website, Lutra cd-rom materials (2006) and from Lutra evaluation reports. Le Chéile are also indebted to the numerous organisations throughout the country who we have had the pleasure of working alongside on Strengthening Families Programme. The spirit of true inter-agency work and the genuine desire to deliver the Strengthening Families Programme to benefit families has been a hugely positive by-product of the Programme itself.

Le Chéile may update and add material to this Information Guide as each programme takes place and we welcome your questions, suggestions and comments on how we can improve this Information Guide. Please contact us on [lyndsey@lecheile.ie](mailto:lyndsey@lecheile.ie) or [lorraine@lecheile.ie](mailto:lorraine@lecheile.ie)

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## **Le Chéile Mentoring and Youth Justice Support Services Strategy (2015-2018)**

The Strengthening Families Programme plays a pivotal role in Le Chéile’s Strategy (2015-2018) “Inspiring Change Transforming Lives” as Le Chéile is responsible for the national coordination and funding of the Strengthening Families Programme on behalf of Young Persons Probation. This programme works with families as a whole – parents/ grandparents/carers and children. It has been proven to help build communication skills, decrease risk factors in families and reduce negative behaviours in children.

The Strengthening Families Programme sits within objective one of Le Chéile’s Strategy (2015-2018) “Inspiring Change Transforming Lives”.

<b>Objective 1 Develop the quality and effectiveness of Le Chéile’s mentoring and family support services for young people at risk, in the justice system</b>			
<b>Goals</b>		<b>Actions</b>	<b>Outputs</b>
<b>1.1</b>	Develop the Le Chéile service model - Mentoring, Family Support and Restorative Justice to be the leading model in the youth justice system.	Management of the Strengthening Families Programme on behalf of the Probation Service.	SFP is available for all referred Probation families, subject to appropriate resources.

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## Background to the Strengthening Families Programme

The Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) is a 14-session family skills training programme developed by Dr. Karol L. Kumpfer and associates, at the University of Utah in 1982.

The programme was initially developed as a prevention strategy for 6-12 year olds and high risk children of drug and alcohol stressed families. SFP now however is used in other settings, including schools, family agencies, sheltered housing (USA) and in Ireland has been delivered in the community or in family resource settings with medium to high risk families.

The programme has been proven to help parents/ guardians and their children build new, healthy parent/child communication skills. These skills build positive relationships within the family and address family behaviour management and encourages families to have fun in the process.

Positive results from empirical research of this Programme over 15 years in the U.S.A and other countries, demonstrate that the programme is robust and effective in strengthening a family in its values and boundaries, thus creating protective factors for a family. The course actively improves family relationships, parenting skills and within teens/younger children, social and life skills. In addition, SFP is recognised by many federal agencies in the USA as an exemplary, researched-based family model.

## The Structure of the Strengthening Families Programme

The SFP curriculum includes three skills courses (Parent Skills Training, Teen Skills Training and Family Life Skills Training) taught together over 14 weeks, once a week.

For SFP purposes, a “family” is one or more adults with long term responsibility for one or more teens. SFP skills are not special skills for deficient families; SFP skills are for all families, but presented in a way to make them accessible to high stress families. Incentives for attendance, positive participation, home practice completion, and graduation are recommended and encouraged. The programme provides family meals before each session, transportation, and child care which reduce barriers to participation.

Before the programme begins families and facilitators gather together for a family meal and an opportunity to get to know each other.

In the first hour of the programme, parents and children participate in separate groups focusing on different skills each week and in the final hour families come together to practice these skills.

*Note: The Strengthening Families Program is designed to be conducted in 14 consecutive sessions, with each session lasting approximately two hours (plus a meal). The Lutra Group have confirmed that the program can be “unbundled”, however effectiveness is greatest when all three are taught together (Lutra Group Leader Training notes 2007).*

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## **Structure of the Strengthening Families Programme**

### **Parents Group**

Parents learn new skills to increase desired behaviours in children by using: attention, rewards, clear communication, effective discipline, substance use education, problem solving and limit setting techniques.

The new skills/ information and participation in a group provide support and learning about the primary role of parenting and the strengths of positive communication in fortifying family life.

### **Teens Group**

In the Teen group, Teens learn skills on how to: communicate positively, understand feelings, cope with criticism and manage stress, develop social skills, learn problem solving, resisting peer pressure, understanding the consequences of substance abuse and how short term consequences affect long term dreams and goals.

The group also explore why teens need to comply with parental rules and what parents want for their children.

### **Family Group**

During the second hour the families join together and practice the following: structured family activities, family meetings, healthy communication skills, effective discipline, re-enforcing positive behaviours for each other, jointly planning family activities outside the group, dealing with embarrassing/difficult subject matter regarding sexuality/drink/drug usage.

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## **Objectives of the Strengthening Families Programme**

The major objectives for the Strengthening Families Programme for the family, the parents, and teens are:

### **To Improve Family Relations**

- Improve Family Communications
- Improve Family Bonding and Cohesion
- Increase Family Organization and Planning
- Decrease Family Conflict
- Increase Parent/Child Time Together
- Increase Parent's Empathy towards Child

### **To Increase Parenting Skills**

- Increase Parent Knowledge of Parenting
- Increase Parenting Self-Esteem or Efficacy
- Increase Positive Attention and Praise
- Reduce Physical Punishment
- Increase Effective Discipline
- Decrease Parenting Stress
- Decrease Parent Depression

### **To Improve Child's Behaviour**

- Increase Child's Compliance
- Increase Child's School Bonding and Attachment
- Increase Child's School Grades and Performance
- Decrease Child's Overt Aggression
- Decrease Child's Covert Aggression
- Decrease Child's Hyperactivity
- Decrease Child's Shyness
- Decrease Child's Depression

### **To Increase Children's Social Competencies**

- Increase Communication Skills
- Increase Peer Refusal Skills
- Increase Recognition of Feelings
- Increase Knowledge of Alcohol and Drugs
- Increase Coping Skills for Anger and Criticism
- Reduce Future Intentions of Using Alcohol and Drugs

### **To Reduce or Prevent Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

- Decrease Parent's Alcohol/Drug use
- Prevent Child's Alcohol/Drug use

The objectives have also been designed to address teen pregnancy, poor life adjustment, decrease children's intermediate risk factors (i.e., behavioural, social, emotional, and school problems) and improve protective factors (i.e., coping, communication, social, and academic skills) by improving family relations and parenting and supervision skills and significantly

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improve relationship skills.

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## The Le Chéile Model for SFP

### **The Strengthening Families Programme Cycle**

It can be useful to think about the different stages of a Strengthening Families Programme and what needs to be done at each stage. In order to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people and parents, Le Chéile recommends that practitioners adopt this model of events with regard to the Strengthening Families Programme.



The above three stage cycle is used in this Information Guide to assist those delivering the SFP to identify the key stages of a Strengthening Families Programme. It is also used to illustrate how equally important all the stages are.

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## **Stage One -Planning:**

### **The Steering Committee**

The first step in planning a Strengthening Families Programme in an area is to form a Steering Committee. This should be populated by a number of relevant agencies who currently work with families on a caring basis, ideally with reference to the age group of families with teenagers.

Steering Committee members should bring enthusiasm to the committee, commitment to good practice, solution focused thinking, and a child centred ethos and positivity to deliver the programme successfully. The steering committee will be the means to address any issues which arise throughout the 3 stages of the programme.

In addition it can be useful for Steering Committee members to have a natural mix of professions, thus having a broad understanding of areas such as programme planning, youth work, counselling, family services, child protection, working with offenders etc.

Le Chéile has developed a sample Steering Committee Meeting Agenda Template and sample Terms of Reference Template for SFP Steering Committees. Role descriptions for the Site Coordinator, Facilitators and Referral Agents are also available from Le Chéile. The Steering Committee should consider carefully the facets of each role and consider how they can best support these individuals in their roles and the implementation of a quality intervention for the families.

### **Key considerations for the Steering Committee:**

- (a) Funding
- (b) Referrals
- (c) Timeframe
- (d) Personnel
- (e) Site Logistics and Materials/Supplies.
- (f) Incentives, Transport, Childcare and Catering
- (g) Policies
- (h) Paperwork
- (i) Evaluation (also see Section Three)

#### **(a) Funding:**

The most important initial step of the Steering Committee is to establish the clear need for a Strengthening Families Programme in the area before funding is sought. This can first be established on an informal basis by the agencies represented on the steering committee that will have knowledge of the potential referral base for the proposed programme. At the funding application stage, however, accurate referral numbers should be calculated as much as possible.

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A steering committee requesting funding through Le Chéile should enquire with Le Chéile's Regional SFP Coordinators about availability of funding and conditions/guidelines for the receipt of funding. As these programmes are being funded by Young Persons Probation, funding can only be granted to a Steering Committee on the recommendation of the local area's Senior Probation Officer/ Young Persons Probation Officer. This recommendation also comes with the understanding that a percentage of places on the programme are offered to the Probation service/ Young Persons Probation or agencies funded through the Irish Youth Justice Service in the area of the proposed programme.

## **Le Chéile Funding:**

- Where Le Chéile provides 100% of funding, it is expected that 40% of the referrals to the programme come from Youth Justice Services/ Agencies.
- Where Le Chéile provides 50% of funding, it is expected that 25% of the referrals to the programme come from Youth Justice Services/ Agencies.
- Where Le Chéile funds programmes for amounts other than specified above, they will advise on the required number of Youth Justice Referrals for that programme.
- Should a referral come from a different agency, it may be useful to investigate any connection the family has to a Youth Justice Service.

## **(b) Referrals:**

The Strengthening Families Programme in Ireland to date has welcomed referrals from families in the community, statutory and/or voluntary sector.

The SFP is able to accommodate families with single or multiple primary caretakers and multiple or single children within the age range. A Parent is defined as the child's primary caregiver(s) and is interpreted in a broad context (e.g., foster parents, same sex couples, step parents, adoptive parents, kinship care, etc.) and these considerations are important when adapting the programme to the specific referrals on your programme.

The recommended number of families on the programme is twelve which allows for some level of drop off during the running of the programmes. Le Chéile recommends accepting up to 14 families on the programme as experience has shown that some families may not engage in the first few weeks of the programme due to a number of factors. The Strengthening Families Programme has a recommended budget based on a capacity of twelve families enrolling and participating in the programme, but in reality many groups begin with 10-12 families, with 8-10 families graduating the programme and this should be taken into consideration when budgeting for your particular programme.

It is advisable that steering committees invite their local Probation Service/ Young Persons Probation, Juvenile Liaison Officer, Garda Youth Diversion Project and An Garda Síochána

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Community Garda representatives to sit on the steering committee to assist with these requirements, or to communicate with them during the planning stage if this is not possible. If referrals are coming from the Adult Probation teams ideally it needs to be shown that the Adult Probation Client and their teens will benefit from the programme from a preventative capacity.

A referral subcommittee of the Steering Committee (which includes the Site Coordinator) may be useful in assisting in the referral process and in selecting appropriate referrals.

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### (C)Timeframe:

There follows a few considerations which a steering committee may wish to discuss in relation to their specific area/ time of programme. This is by no means a definitive or exhaustive list and should be used as more of a discussion guide to assist in deciding on the timeframe required.

Time of Year	Advantages	Challenges
September	Anecdotally considered a good time for most people to start something new, children start back at school, families get back into a routine. Programme may get completed before Christmas.	In terms of referrals, agencies have experienced difficulty in gaining referrals as the referral agencies are sometime on holidays in July and August. Centres are closed etc. May need to consider support issues for families over Christmas.
October	Can be advantageous as referrers are mostly back to work in September and may have new case loads to refer on in October. Most youth centres re-establish programmes in September. Can support families who may have experienced difficulties over Christmas.	If commenced in October, the programme is finishing after Christmas, which might prove challenging as there may be some disruption over the Christmas period which may result in difficulties in reengaging families.
April	Gives the opportunity for good planning to take place from January to March.	Risk of the programme going right through to June and July when many people take annual leave and family holidays.
Feb	Good time to start as it may mean that the programme finishes before end of school.	May run into the Easter school holidays which might have an impact on attendance.
March	Can be a good time to start a programme and the programme may then end at the end of May before the break for school holidays.	A chance of professionals taking holidays in May. May be disrupted by the Easter period.
January	Can be a good time to start but one would need to be mindful of the actual start date after the Christmas period.	May be difficult to get hold of referrers or families during the 1st or second week of January.

**Note: As outlined in Le Chéile’s SFP Funding Application Form, due to the funding structure of Le Chéile, it is only possible to fund programmes that run in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the calendar year.**

\*\*\* With regard to mid-term breaks; programmes may experience a low-turn out, simply because the family are “out of a routine” and/or may be involved in other activities.

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## **(d)Personnel**

A total of at least four group leaders are recommended to deliver the program, as stated by the SFP creators. In reality, in Ireland a core team of 8-10 personnel each night may be needed. The programme works best having two group leaders for the Parent Training group and another two group leaders for the Teens' Skill Training group (depending on size of teen group).

During the Family Skills Training sessions, the families may split into two groups with at least two group leaders in each group, or meet as a whole with at least four group leaders. It is strongly recommended that the group leaders are gender balanced (male and female) and ethnically matched to the participants where possible. (SFP 2006)

The Steering Committee should be aware of the training & accreditation process for Strengthening Families personnel. Each facilitator/Group Leader should have completed the Two Day SFP Group Leader training and have additional facilitation skills and experience with the group they will be facilitating.

An assessment should be made by the Site Coordinator and/or Steering Committee around the need for a refresher morning/day for facilitators of the programme and meetings of the facilitators in the run up to the programme have been found to be useful in answering questions and bonding the facilitators as a group.

It is recommended that those coming into contact with young people be both Garda Vetted and have an understanding of the principles of the Children's First National Guidance (2011).

The Group leaders and the Site Coordinator are the most valuable resource in the Strengthening Families Programme. Their training and the facilitation they provide to both the children and parents is what will make or break the programme. They should be selected and trained carefully and supported throughout the process by their organisations, the Steering Committee and the Site Coordinator. They must find a balance between the needs of individuals and the needs of the group as a whole; between the problems of the children and those of the parents and they must be sensitive to the feelings of the families while maintaining order and a sense of responsibility for imparting the skills of the program. This can be a challenging assignment but a hugely rewarding one for all involved including the families, the individuals and their organisation.

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The personnel requirement per region in Ireland may vary but the average cohort of facilitators in each region may be as follows:

<b>SFP Personnel</b>	<b>Number Needed</b>
Site Coordinator(s)	1 or 2 (where joint site co-ordination is agreed)
Parent Facilitators (Group Leaders)	2 (minimum)
Teen Facilitators (Group Leaders)	2 or 4 depending on the size of the group and whether there is a need to split the groups into younger and elder teens.
Time out Facilitators/Floaters/Helpers.	1 or 2
Back Up Group Leaders.	As many as thought appropriate.
Childcare Personnel (if available on-site)	This depends on the number of children in childcare
Security/Caretaker	Depending on the need

Note:

- All those involved in implementing the SFP are to have completed the SFP two-day training.
- All those involved in implementing the SFP should be satisfactorily Garda Vetted with their current employer.
- All those involved should have attended Children’s First National Guidance (2011) training and/or have an excellent understanding of the Children’s First National Guidance (2011).
- It is recommended that all those involved should have access to supervision from their own organisation and the full support of their organisation throughout the duration of the programme. (Personnel trained under YPP delivered trainings since 2010 will have needed to provide a signed statement to this effect from their Manager).

## **Additional staff**

Additional staff includes childcare providers, food preparation, transport personnel as needed for programme implementation. Childcare providers are recommended to provide on-site childcare and supervision of families’ youth not participating in the curriculum due to age inappropriateness. Some building and resources may provide crèche facilities while other programmes may put in place other external arrangements in relation to child minding with the caregiver and the referral agent.

## **Previous participants’ involvement in a programme as group leaders or aides**

Parents who have completed the Strengthening Families Program can be very effective as future leaders or training aides in other groups. In many ways, they may be able to relate better to the current participants. If your area is conducting the Strengthening Families Programme on an ongoing basis, be sure to make a note to talk with those parents who have potential as future

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leaders or aides. Since they have already participated in the program, they will be able to relate their own personal examples concerning the effectiveness of the program to new participants. They may also be helpful in recruiting for a new group.

## **The Site Coordinator**

The Site Coordinator will be expected to work closely with the Steering Committee, Le Chéile's Regional SFP Coordinator and the many other agencies and stakeholders involved and referring into the Strengthening Families Programme. It is important that a Steering Committee supports and assists the Site Coordinator through the SFP process.

A Site Coordinator may be responsible for referrals, oversight, logistics, staff supervision and coordinating the program implementation, delivery and evaluation. This includes being accessible to families between sessions to assist in queries and maintain retention.

## **Site Coordinators should:**

- Have the commitment of their organisation to participate in the SFP
- Have time, enthusiasm & a willingness to fulfil the Site Coordinator commitment
- Be able to relate to and communicate well with a wide range of people, including young people, parents, grandparents & adult clients, volunteers, staff, referrers, committee members, funders and develop positive relationships with them.
- Be open to reflective and non judgmental practice & lead SF personnel to do same.
- Identify & communicate their own support needs & make effective use of the support mechanisms provided by their own organisation and the Steering Committee.

## **The Duties of a Site Coordinator may include:**

- Organising and Coordinating the Strengthening Families Programme in conjunction with the Steering Committee.
- Liaising with the available batch of facilitators for the programme delivery.
- Giving practical help, guidance & support to the SF facilitators before & during the programme.
- Actively encouraging, supporting and promoting referrals to the SF programme from relevant agencies alongside the Steering Committee.
- Liaising with all Referral Agents regarding their client's commencement or non commencement.
- Linking in with referrers to ensure they provide support to families throughout the programme.
- Managing the budget allocated for the programme and administrating the funds according to the procedures set down by the funders, alongside the Steering Committee.
- Attend Steering Committee meetings where appropriate during the course of the programme.
- Coordinating all issues in relation to catering, childcare and transport alongside the Steering Committee.

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- Being the Designated Liaison Person for Child Protection disclosures
- Compiling and completing the evaluation paperwork for the programme.
- Ensuring the completion of weekly sign in sheets/attendance sheets.
- Compiling statistics in line with data requirements & with a view to evaluation.
- Ensuring Health and Safety policies and procedures are adhered to, as set down by the Steering Committee and venue.
- Following policy & procedure guidelines on the delivery of the programme as specified by the Steering Committee, the funders of the programme and the creators of the programme.
- Being responsible, along with the Steering Committee and other facilitators, for ensuring best practice within all aspects of the Strengthening Families programme.

## **Site Coordinator Support Manual:**

The Site Coordinator Support Manual was first published in 2015 by Cork and Kerry Strengthening Families Programme Steering Committee. It is a resource for Site Coordinators who are managing the implementation of the Strengthening Families Programme. This manual should only be used upon completion of the Site Coordinator Support Workshop. Le Chéile strongly recommends that all personnel new to the role of SFP Site Coordinator attend the Support Workshop.

The Site Coordinator Support Manual and Workshop has been developed to assist individuals undertaking the role of Site Coordinator, it assumes that the Site Coordinator has baseline knowledge of the programme content and the logistics associated with the delivery of this programme. The Site Coordinator Support Manual follows a Life Cycle approach and is divided into three sections, pre programme, in-programme and post programme. The tasks that need to be completed by the Site Coordinator at each stage of the life cycle of the programme are outlined in each section. The templates contained in the manual include all necessary documentation for the roll out of a Strengthening Families Programme and are in line with Best Practice and quality standards.

For further information regarding this manual please contact Lorraine O'Donovan on [lorraine@lecheile.ie](mailto:lorraine@lecheile.ie)

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## **(e) Site Logistics and Materials/Supplies:**

### **Site Logistics:**

Sites are selected based on accessibility and appropriateness for families to come together for a positive skills building programme. The site must avoid stigmatising or labelling attending families based on the local community's perception of the activities and persons that generally frequent the site. The site must be accessible by public transportation in those communities where the families utilise such transportation and/or have parking available in convenient well-lit areas. The site must not only be safe, but must be perceived as safe, particularly for young and vulnerable children.

The programme recommends that the site have adequate facilities for the children and parents to meet separately for one hour and for the families to meet together for a meal and one hour of programme curriculum. Additionally, there must be adequate space for childcare while parents are attending sessions. If the meal is to be prepared or stored on-site, there must be adequate facilities for food safety. Issues around insurance, health and safety, fire safety, security, first aid and emergency procedures should all be taken into consideration when selecting a venue.

### **(f) Materials and Supplies:**

Materials needed are specified in each session. It is strongly recommended that these materials for the entire programme be reviewed and obtained before the programme begins. In general, the materials necessary to conduct the Strengthening Families Program include:

- Leader manuals
- Parent and Teen's handbooks
- Name tags
- Course outline, welcome letter, course dates.
- Construction paper, scissors, paste, newsprint
- Tables and chairs
- Incentives/rewards
- Pens, crayons, paints, soft balls

In the Teen's group sessions, leaders may choose to copy and laminate pictures available in the workbooks (conversation skills) onto brightly coloured construction paper.

During all sessions, parents and teens should have access to a variety of resources, games, YouTube clips etc. The best resources are those that allow them to express feelings. These resources should be attained from agencies involved on any level with the SFP, where possible, to ensure a value for money and inter-agency approach.

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## **(g) Incentives, Childcare, Transport and Catering**

Programme incentives for participation increase retention and reinforce the programme and assist dramatically in reducing barriers to participation by families. Incentives that are tied to, build on and reinforce the curriculum are recommended. These include a family meal provided at each session, transportation, childcare, graduation certificates and completion and supplies necessary for the family to complete the home practice and weekly activities. Please note that incentives, childcare, transport and catering requirements must be kept in line within the programmes overall SFP budget.

### **Childcare:**

Childcare may be required by families and can be provided at the site or off the site during the sessions. Since the programme is promoting parental responsibility and family organisation, it should facilitate and assure age appropriate care for other children in the family, both younger and older than the participating children if provided on-site. On-site childcare provision should be in keeping with providing a safe environment and fun activities for children not included in the skills training. Specific arrangements regarding contributions to off-site childcare provision may be entered into with the family in consultation with the Site Coordinator, the referring agent and the family. Issues relating to the insurance, vat registration, training, clearance, confidentiality etc. should all be considered if providing on-site childcare provision.

### **Transportation:**

Transportation to and from the programme needs to be assured and coordinated within the resources of the community and the programme. This is particularly true since some families may not have access to private transportation. Additionally, many of these families do not want and should not have to disclose that transportation is the barrier, particularly in the recruitment and early sessions of the programme. Local community agencies may provide appropriate transport services at reduced rates or for free in line with community and family development and in a spirit of inter-agency co-operation. Issues relating to insurance, vat registration, confidentiality etc. should be considered when selecting an appropriate transport provider.

### **Incentives:**

Many grocery stores, food outlets, toy stores, restaurants, etc. may be willing to donate gift certificates, prizes, and other incentives for group attendance, completion of homework assignments, good behaviour for children's group, etc. This is an excellent resource that should not be overlooked. Budgets should allow for some incentives for both the teens and parents throughout the programme. Incentives should be used appropriately throughout the programme and how this is done should be considered by the Site Coordinator and the facilitators before the programme begins.

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## Catering:

Providing a warm, nutritious meal is a key element for each programme and arrangements should be made with the building being used or with an outside caterer to provide a meal to all families each night. It may be beneficial for facilitators and Site Coordinators to make the dining room a pleasant experience for all by lightly decorating and servicing the room accordingly, for example: cutlery, glasses, drinks, condiments, napkins etc.

Facilitators and Site Coordinators are encouraged to sit among the families and not to bunch together or be separate in order to promote a communal spirit and to assist in getting to know the families. The dinner is often found to be a useful time to link with the families who may have experienced difficulties in the previous week and also just to help them feel at ease, particularly in the first few weeks. Considerations in relation to catering should be given to; staff, health and safety, hygiene, insurance, vat registration, clearance, confidentiality etc.

Where issues arise due to the lack of tendering or of full and appropriate checks not being carried out on service providers Le Chéile will not accept any liability in relation to these issues and may in some cases not issue payment for services which have not gone through an appropriate tendering and selection process.

## (h) Policies

Le Chéile has developed a number of sample policies which may be of use to Steering Committees in their planning of SFP. While we are happy to make these sample policies available on request, however please note that they are samples and each policy should be discussed by each Steering Committee to ensure that the policy is in line with other policies and fit for purpose in the proposed venue. The samples available include;

- Eldercare/ Childcare Reimbursement Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Emergency Evacuation policy
- Drug & Alcohol Policy
- Spillage of Blood/ Bodily Fluids Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Referral Policy
- Tendering Documentation
- Declaration of Suitability from SFP Personnel

To avail of these sample policies please contact the Regional SFP Coordinator in your region.

These policies have been developed and are made available in the spirit of ensuring a SFP is run under best practice principles to the benefit of the families, agencies involved and the community as a whole. These policies are by no means meant to be all encompassing, definitive or legally binding articles but should be utilised or carefully adapted where appropriate by the

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Steering Committee as a whole. Programmes that receive funds from Le Chéile should utilise these policies unless similar or existing policies are suitable and preferred by their local Steering Committee.

A dramatic change of policy usage should always be discussed with Le Chéile for programmes receiving funding. Le Chéile accepts no liability for programmes which do not use policies which come from a best practice ethos and have consideration to child protection and the duty of care to the families and facilitators taking part in the SFP.

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## **(i) Paperwork**

Le Chéile has put together a wide range of sample forms that can be used throughout a SFP programme. Some of these forms were shared with Le Chéile by other agencies also involved in SFP around the country, and to these agencies we are particularly grateful for sharing some of their learning's with us. Others have been created by Le Chéile and/or adapted by Steering Committees with which we have been involved.

Programmes that receive funds from Le Chéile should utilise these forms unless similar or existing forms are available in their own agency. The purpose of these forms are both to assist recording data where required and to ensure best practice and any other paperwork used or adapted should incorporate this ethos.

## **(j) Evaluation**

For information on how a Steering Committee evaluates the programme and the requirements of a Le Chéile funded programme in relation to evaluations please see Stage Three of this Guide.

## **Stage Two – Delivery:**

The Strengthening Families Programme is designed to be presented in 14 consecutive weekly sessions, with each session (excluding the food) lasting approximately two hours. Parents and Teens come together along with the other families and facilitators at the beginning of each session for a meal. Following a general welcome, the first hour is spent with the parents and children meeting in their own respective groups. At the end of these groups there may follow a short break before families re reunited in the Family Group. This second period is spent in the Family Skills Training portion of the programme. Depending on the number of participants, this group may be divided into smaller groups or may remain together.

Please note that this section is mostly comprised of information taken directly from the Lutra SFP US Revised Implementation Manual 2006 (located in the SFP 2006 cd-rom) and the Lutra Fidelity Benchmarks 2008.

References to “child” or “children” may have been changed to “teen” or “teens” by Le Chéile. Other references may also have been removed to make it more applicable to Irish Teens.

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## Programme Content

### The Parents Programme & Structure of Meetings

The format for each session is specified in each session's curriculum. Generally, each session begins with a review of home practice and the previous week's concepts. Next, the training material is presented in a variety of ways including exercises, lectures, discussions, role playing, etc. New concepts are then reviewed and new home practice is assigned. Ideally, there should be two leaders per group.

Training methods for the parents', teen's and family groups include lecture, demonstration, discussion, role-playing, audio-visuals, charts, home practice assignments, exercises, peer support, Teen's Game, Parents' Game, supervised practice etc.

Actual delivery of the lessons will vary depending on the individual characteristics of the group leaders. Ways of adapting the content to make it interesting, fun and specifically targeted to your individual group should be considered by the Group Leaders when preparing the lesson, whilst also not modifying or straying from the actual purpose of the lesson.

### Outline of Parent Skills Training Sessions over the 14 Weeks

1. Introductions and Group Building
2. What Teens Are Like & How to Manage Stress
3. Encouraging Good Behaviour
4. Goals and Objectives
5. Communication for Better Relationships
6. Communication and Family Meetings
7. Helping Your Teen Handle Peer Pressure
8. Alcohol, Drugs and Families
9. Solving Problems and Giving Directions
10. Relationships, Love and Sexuality
11. Setting Limits I
12. Setting Limits II
13. Contracts for Changing Behaviour
14. Remembering All You Have Learned

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## Overview of Content for Parent Groups

1. Introduction and Group Building: This opening session welcomes parents to the Strengthening Families Program. Sessions are reviewed and a course outline is distributed to group members. Attrition, barriers to attendance, and rewards are discussed. Group building exercises and a short talk on how people learn are also presented.
2. What Teens Are Like & How to Manage Stress: Parents and leaders discuss realistic expectations in terms of developmental expectancies. Stress and anger management are also covered in the second session. (Discipline is not covered in detail until later on in the program.)
3. Encouraging Good Behaviour: Rewarding teens for their good behaviour is covered in detail in this session. Rewarding is differentiated from bribery. Rewarding with attention and social rewards are also discussed. The "catch them being good" philosophy can be emphasised.
4. Goals and Objectives: This fourth session includes a short talk on teen development. The majority of the session is spent on goal setting, defining "good behaviour", making behavioural goals and objectives, and making positive statements to their teens.
5. Communication for Better Relationships: This lesson focuses on ways to talk and listen that will make family life and being a parent easier, less stressful and more rewarding. The Value of Speaking and Listening Skill are emphasised. The benefits of communication are re-enforced, "I" messages are used and the speaker, listener and coaching roles are used. Roadblocks to effective communication are also discussed. Extensive time is spent role playing these skills. Parents are also instructed to practice them at home with their teens
6. Communication and Family Meetings: This session reinforces concepts discussed in session five. Group members role play significant issues with one another. The importance and benefits of family meeting are also introduced with sample agendas and practicalities discussed also.
7. Helping Your Teen Handle Peer Pressure: Understanding peer pressure, temptation and the general difficulties faced by teens around saying No are discussed with a view to teaching parents skills to help their teen to handle peer pressure. The 4 steps to saying No are also taught in this session.
8. Alcohol, Drugs, and Families: This session is suitable for use with any family, whether or not parents have or have had problems with alcohol or drugs. However it may be advisable to adapt it if parents are still in a state of denial or with regard to other issues that may arise from the subject matter. This session also introduces the parents' role in prevention of problem behaviours in their teens. "Awareness of parents influence on teens" is also discussed.
9. Solving Problems and Giving Directions: Parents are taught basic problem solving skills, which their teens are also learning during this session. Communication in relation to giving directions is also covered in this session.
10. Relationships, Love and Sexuality: Talking to teens about sexuality and the need to prepare for this and to recognise the importance of same are discussed in this session. This can be a sensitive topic and should be handled as such with respect to different values relating to topics that may arise.
11. Setting Limits I: During this session, parents are taught noticing/ignoring, making it right,

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natural consequences, loss of privileges and time-out strategies. "Good behaviour cues" are also discussed.

12. Setting Limits II: The limit setters discussed in session eleven are reviewed. The issue of consequences and "punishment" is covered extensively. The drawbacks to "punishment" and reasons why some disciplines don't work are also covered.

13. Contracts for Changing Behaviour: The Steps involved in implementing behavioural change are covered in this session. This includes identifying problem behaviours, behaviours parents would like their teen to perform, goal statements, etc. The group then helps develop the first week of a behaviour programme for their teens. Parents then rehearse the words they will use to introduce this with their teen in the group, receiving feedback from other parents. The Evaluation component may also be completed in this session if not completed externally with their referral agent.

14. Remembering All You Have Learned: This session focuses on all that has been learned in the last 14 weeks and especially on new skills and strengths within the family unit. The importance of continuing to use the skills learned and affirming all that they have achieved is emphasised by the group leaders. A nice closing to the group should precede the graduation ceremony.

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## **The Teens Programme & Structure of Meetings**

Following the general welcome during the meal, Teens then go to their group and any young children go to childcare. (Child care for children under 12 years of age is a service that may be offered on-site or off-site depending on the particulars of your programme) There also may be provision for 2 teen groups e.g. 1 Group comprising teens 12 – 14 years and 1 Group comprising teens 15-17 years.

There should be two leaders per group. Optimum participant number for the Teens groups may be 6-7 teens per group. The format for each session is specified in each session's curriculum. Generally, each Teen's session begins with a review of homework and the previous week's concepts. Teens are then taught the new material through the use of exercises, games, workbook activities, role plays, discussions, etc. A review is then conducted, and new home practice is assigned. Teens following group rules (as explained in session one) may receive reinforcements and incentives (prize, novelties, etc.) for good behaviour.

## **Outline of Teens Skills Training Sessions over the 14 Weeks**

1. Getting Started and Dreams
2. Speaking and Listening
3. Staying Cool in Conflicts
4. Being Who You Want to Be
5. Speaking for Yourself
6. Speaking Up in Your Family
7. Handling Peer Pressure and Temptation
8. Alcohol and Drugs
9. Problem Solving
10. Friends, Dating and Sexuality
11. Managing Emotions
12. Handling Criticism
13. Coping with Anger
14. Resources, Review and Graduation

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## Overview of Content for Teens Groups

1. Getting Started and Dreams: This opening session welcomes Teens to the group through the use of games. Teens are also told why their group has been established. The remainder of the session is devoted to developing and discussing group rules and focusing on Dreams and Goals.
2. Speaking and Listening: Teens review rules and incentives as well as the names of participants in the group. Conversation skills, specifically talking and listening are discussed. Teens can then play some suggested games, colour illustrated conversation skills workbook pages, or role play to reinforce the concept of social skills.
3. Staying Cool in Conflicts: Checking in with teens and discussing how it might be possible to recognise conflicts and strategies around staying cool in conflict situations are discussed. Speaking for yourself is also discussed and teens are introduced to the “I feel...” method.
4. Being Who You Want to Be: The importance of learning “People” Skills and being who you want to be are introduced in this session. A teen’s likes and dislikes, knowledge of what they want to change are all discussed. Goal statements are then formed and teens are taught the “Secret Rules of Success,” – Rewarding and Ignoring -the same principles their parent(s) are learning in the parents' group. Teens then role play relevant situations where they can use the “success rules.”
5. Speaking for Yourself: Following a review of social skills learned to date, Teens are then taught the use of additional speaking and listening skills such as use of “I feel” messages, saying one thing at a time, not talking for others, showing interest, accepting other's views, asking questions, not jumping to conclusions, etc.
6. Speaking Up in Your Family: “Rules for Family Talks” and speaking and listening rules are reviewed. Holding “family meetings” and talking in your family are discussed with tips for family talks being taught. A family meeting is role played and practicalities surrounding this are discussed.
7. Handling Peer Pressure and Temptation: Saying “No” to stay out of trouble and ways to deal with peer pressure are taught in this session. The four steps to saying No are laid out and role played.
8. Alcohol and Drugs: Teens are taught the effects and consequences of alcohol and drug use and abuse through the use of stories, lecture, and discussion.
9. Problem Solving: Seven steps to solving problems are presented in this session. Teens role play several examples to reinforce the concept.
10. Relationships, Love and Sexuality: The issues around talking to their parents about relationships love and sexuality and tips to assist in doing so are discussed in this session.
11. Managing Emotions: In this session teens are taught about recognising and managing Emotions and Feelings through the use of discussion, games and worksheets. Teens are taught how to recognise feelings in themselves and in others, how people may feel similar or different feelings about the same situations, and what to do with those feelings.
12. Handling Criticism: Handling and Dealing with Criticism: This session focuses on how to give

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and receive criticism and what is criticism itself. Role plays are used to illustrate the concept.

13. Coping with Anger: Teens discuss things that make them mad, how to cope with anger and how to control and express anger. Problem solving skills are reviewed in relation to dealing with anger. Teens then role play the new skills.

14. Resources, Review and Graduation: Teens are taught about other resources that can help them if they have problems and their parent(s) are unavailable to help. Again, problem solving skills are emphasised, as are staying safe and staying out of trouble (reviewed from session five). Teens then review all fourteen sessions, which may be done in the form of a game, if desired. Wrapping up the session in a positive manner, emphasising all they have learned and achieved is important ahead of the graduation activities arranged.

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## **The Family Programme & Structure of Meetings**

The Family Skills Training programme follows the parents' and teen's groups curriculum and is designed for each with each session to last up to one hour. The families may all come together as one group (or there may need to be two groups of families depending on the numbers). The format for each session is specified in each session's curriculum. This component may require a large room which may be equipped with age-appropriate equipment. There should be two leaders per group to help the families practice the Teens Game, Parents' Game, provide individual support, etc.

## **Outline of Teens Skills Training Sessions over the 14 Weeks**

1. Introduction and Group Building
2. Appreciating Family Members
3. Our Time and Rewards
4. Goals and Objectives
5. Communication for Better Relationships
6. Communication and Family Meetings
7. Supporting Teenagers Resistance
8. Learning from Parents
9. Problem Solving and Giving Directions
10. Relationships, Love and Sexuality
11. Empathy: The Other Persons Shoes
12. Family Values
13. Managing Anger
14. Graduation and Celebration

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## Overview of Content for Family Group

1. Introduction and Group Building: This session is to presents the rationale of the SFP, presents the format and mechanics of the family group and explains the rationale and the importance of Our Time.
2. Appreciating Family Members: The session provides the parents with the concept of noticing and rewarding and emphasises the importance of doing so during Our Time. Families are also invited to make a family tree.
3. Our Time and Rewards: Rewards: Parents and teens continue to practice the Our Time while leaders review noticing skills and introduce the concept of rewards.
4. Goals and Objectives: Parents and teens continue to practice Our Time and to focus on goals and objectives. The “Spend the Jackpot” game is played toward the end
5. Communication for Better Relationships: The purpose of this session is to present and discuss the reasons for practicing communication skills and to review the rules and roles of communication skills.
6. Communication and Family Meetings: Families are encouraged to practice communication skills while continuing to use Our Time and Family Meetings are discussed and demonstrated.
7. Supporting Teenagers’ Resistance: Pressures that destroy dreams; Knowing Who, What, Where, When and Identifying Family Protective Strategies are introduced.
8. Learning From Parents: Families continue to practice communication skills and the issue of what is “learned” from parents is discussed.
9. Problem Solving, Giving Directions: Parents practice giving effective directions and problem solving with their teens.
10. Relationships, Love and Sexuality: Being prepared and ready to talk about sexuality in a family setting is discussed and families are asked to make the time for this.
11. Empathy – The other persons shoes: Putting yourself in the other persons shoes and demonstrations and role plays around this are practiced in this session.
12. Family Values: Families focus on what the values in their families are.
13. Managing Anger: Ways to manage anger are taught to the group.
14. Graduation & Celebration: Families are encouraged to plan and take “ownership” of the graduation. Fun activities can be arranged depending on the family’s wishes.

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## Adaptations and Modifications of the Curriculum

The Lutra Group have stated that adaptations are welcome to make the programme more culturally appropriate. Modifications of the programme however should be avoided as this can impact negatively on the quality of the programme and evaluation.

Curriculum fidelity (how true the programme is to the original programme) is dependent on group leaders' delivering all 14 sessions; assigning and reviewing homework and including the content areas specified for each session in sequence. Additionally, group leaders are expected to model the key messages of the programme when interacting with the families, including at the family meal. Activities and skills are designed for and appropriate to Teens aged 12-16 years (SFP 1216 Group Leader Training Lesson Outlines June 2007).

### What is Adaptation?

Adaptations are changes made to get families to the objectives of a lesson - ways to make SFP work better for **these** families. Adaptation can make course concepts more readily understandable or acceptable - more familiar wording examples, explanations or exercises.

#### **Adaptation includes:**

- Making SFP a better fit in terms of culture, age, local custom, religion, or gender.
- Research shows that adaptations didn't improve outcomes, but improved recruitment and retention by 40% (Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, & Bellamy, 2002).
- Adaptations can be made in advance or made on the spot in response to group reactions to the lesson.

### What is Modification?

Modifications involve fundamental changes; i.e., dropping, adding or rearranging lessons. Effects are unknown until evaluated.

It is recommended that each local site tailor the programme to accommodate cultural and community diversity. The programme is designed to provide a framework and an outline of activities that will meet each programme lessons objectives. The skills and activities are prescriptive and are designed to sequentially develop skills amongst Teens and parents which result in improved family, child and parent behavioural and affective outcomes and reduced risk behaviours. (These outcomes are assessed in the outcome evaluation instruments).

However, the group leaders are encouraged to make the programme more culturally and locally appropriate by changing the names of people in the stories, using more appropriate ethnic stories for storytelling, adding food, cultural dances or games that the participants find reflect their traditional family values (SFP 12-16 Group Leader Training Lesson Outline June 2007).

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## **Other Considerations**

### **Quality of Delivery:**

Group leaders are not encouraged to read from the training manuals during the sessions, but rather to present the material in a well-thought out professional manner. They are encouraged to use personally developed flip charts or poster boards for visual outlines of their major points. This helps visual learners to learn better, personalises the programme (vs. power point presentations or overheads), and helps the Group Leaders not to read from their manuals. Group leaders may look better prepared and appear more respectful to the families with material prepared in advance of the group. Group leaders should personalise the delivery to fit their style, local language and examples.

Actual delivery of the session may vary depending on the individual characteristics and experience of the group leaders themselves and the dynamic and make-up of each group. The curriculum is clearly laid out in the manuals complete with instructions for delivery, key lecture content, details of activities, lists of materials needed, homework assignments and handouts for copying and distribution.

### **Group Rules:**

Group rules to be followed by parents, teens and group leaders should be clearly established in session one. The members should help generate the rules, to increase the chances that the rules will be followed. Leaders should include rules they believe are important and not rely solely on the rules generated by the parents and teens. Rules might include such things as speaking in turn, not interrupting, not talking about certain subjects, any aggressive behaviour, etc. Confidentiality should be a group rule, but the leader must also understand and explain his/her duty to report certain issues that may arise. It may be useful to post the group rules in a visible area at the beginning of each session. Some agencies also develop and explain in Session One a “Fair Value Contract.” This contract may list items such as; attend programme sessions, do homework, support others, keep an open mind, etc.

### **Workbooks:**

The parent and teen workbooks can be very useful resources to reinforce concepts discussed in group sessions. Depending on literacy issues and the reading comprehension level of the participants, parents and teens should be encouraged to read their books both before and after the sessions. Parents should be encouraged to read the books and come prepared to the groups with questions, if possible. At the very least, participants should bring their books to the programme each week. If this is not occurring, leaders may try incentivising this behaviour to increase the chances that the books will be brought weekly. If this does not work, leaders may consider keeping the books and bringing them for parents and teens to work on during the group. Emphasise to group members that these books belong to them. They should take care of them and use them.

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## Checking for reading and conceptual levels

It is important to know the reading level of your participants. In the parents' group, higher functioning adults can be instructed to read ahead in the workbooks. They will probably need less instruction for home practice assignments and may be more apt to follow through with the assignments. Lower reading level parents should have home practice assignments carefully explained to them to ensure they understand them well enough to complete the assignments. In addition, leaders should be aware of their conceptual level as well, carefully reading over workbook sheets as needed to see if parents understand what they are required to do as well as understand the ideas presented in the material. Having parents repeat instructions or explain what they will be doing during the week is also a helpful comprehension check.

In the event you discover that a parent is unable to read or has a comprehension problem, do not draw attention to the fact, but privately offer to repeat the assignment until the parent can remember it. It is important that you do not embarrass the parent or act surprised or upset. People who may have literacy issues or who may have a learning disability usually respond very well to discreet, private assistance offered by a trainer or coordinator.

In the Teens group, teens will probably be at various reading and comprehension levels. It is important to review all workbook pages, even with Teens who appear to have higher reading levels. It is also important to have the Teens repeat instructions to check for understanding. Reading the scripts for the workbook pages, etc. are an excellent way to gain group participation, increase interest level of the teens, enhance the self-esteem of the participants, etc. but be sure to be sensitive to those who may have literacy issues or who may have a learning disability and find creative ways to involve lower reading level teens as well.

## Home Practice Assignments:

Assigning home practice to participants presents a unique challenge to leaders. Without tangible incentives for parents and teens it may be possible that few assignments will be properly completed. Providing a scheduled "follow up" at the beginning of each session to review the home practice assigned the previous week, will help participants increase home practice completion.

To increase the chances that home practice is completed, leaders may try several different strategies.

First, when assigning the home practice, parents and teens should understand the importance of the assignment. If they view it simply as unnecessary work, they may be less apt to even consider doing the assignment. In addition, having participants repeat back what they will be doing, to make sure they understand the home practice may also be helpful.

Second, if participants feel that the leaders think the assignments will be useful and are important, they may be more likely to complete them. Leaders should therefore be enthusiastic about the assignments.

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Third, leaders may provide incentives for home practice completion if this is possible and the families are involved in agreeing on appropriate incentives. Having group members involved in aspects like this may provide more “ownership” for the families, which will hopefully increase completion.

Lastly, leaders who socially reinforce group members for completing the assignments at the beginning of each group have more success with follow through than group leaders who do not review homework assignments.

## **Preparing for Graduation:**

A fun activity may be to ask the families if they have any special talents that they could teach others that could be used as entertainment at the graduation, such as parents teaching children dances, songs, meals, music, customs, games, etc. Some suggestions for the graduation may be: organising a buffet or special meal, a raffle, having a presentation of certificates, inviting a guest speaker, asking families if they wish to dress up, having a poem to be read out by a participant, playing party games, organising music, organising for photographs to be taken etc. Generally just discussing with the families what they wish to do in the run up, in order to celebrate the completion of the programme is the best idea.

These families have now successfully completed an intensive programme as a group and are entitled to enjoy and celebrate this very fact with a properly organized graduation ceremony, It is worth also remembering that facilitators have also shared this journey with the families and to make it equally special for them too. Sometimes, it has been found, that it’s the smaller, inexpensive, yet personalized touches (whether it be cards, designed cakes, a nicely laid table with place tags, the nice words that are said etc.) that have been found to be the things that families most appreciate on the graduation. If your graduation is falling close to a seasonal or holiday period it may be an idea to link this in (i.e. Easter eggs at Easter, Santa visiting at Christmas etc.) Most of all make sure and make a Big Deal of what has been achieved over the last 14 weeks and probably most importantly of all... ENJOY IT!

## **Evaluations:**

Leaders should also allow adequate time at the end of the chosen group session(s) to complete evaluation tools being used by that programme and to chart the progress of individual parents, children or families where applicable through the debriefing session and through the reports compiled at the end of each session. If the leaders are completing programme evaluation forms at the end, be sure to document any programme adaptations on these forms also.

## **Knowing when to refer on:**

It is important for leaders to be familiar with local and community resources. Services for those who need individual counselling, group counselling, family counselling, medical services, basic welfare services, etc., may already be accessed by some participants but unknown to others.

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It is also critical that leaders do not offer advice or assistance for problems they are not trained to handle, but rather refer the family to more appropriate agencies through their referral agent and ensuring the referral agent is putting the appropriate interventions/support in place. This may be something a steering committee may wish to discuss ahead of the programme starting.

In addition, it may be an idea to coordinate services with schools, counsellors and other community organisations while the SFP is running. Should participants be accessing other services then the Steering Committee/ Site Coordinator may decide that those facilitating should be aware of this, whilst also taking issues of confidentiality into consideration. Note: Steering Committees should make sure that all appropriate releases-of-information forms and other such documents are signed ahead of the programme.

The Site Coordinator should remind all SFP staff that there is to be no contact with SFP participants following the graduation ceremony (only at the Reunion night). Example: A Group Leader receives call from an SF participant wanting to talk to her about something to do with the course-the caller should be directed back to the Referral Agent.

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## **Stage Three: Evaluation**

The Steering Committee of each Strengthening Families Programme must decide on the type of evaluation method that will be used in order to evaluate their programme prior to the programme commencing e.g. In-house evaluation; or alternatively, seek additional funding separate to that of Le Chéile's for the programme to be independently evaluated e.g. Lutra Group in the USA.

Evaluation should be part of the service planning and delivery. This will tell you whether the intervention is working and will contribute to improving what you do.

Different evaluation users may need different types of evaluation, for instance:

- Practitioners and policy makers: effectiveness; what works, for whom, in what circumstances
- Practitioners: improvement to strengthen implementation; how to make it better
- Funders: accountability; whether to continue investing
- Planning and performance managers: performance monitoring/targets; developmental/formative evaluations
- Service users: service quality - access, experience, relevance to needs

The steering committee should have a clear understanding of what is being evaluated; who will use the evaluation; for what purposes; and the potential consequences.

The steering committee should clearly state the rationale and need for the evaluation; confirm the outcomes for the programme; and the process by which these will be achieved. This provides a sound basis for process and outcome evaluations. It should be noted that Steering Committee should engage with their funder around the costs of evaluations as currently these are not allowable costs for some streams of funding.

## **Follow Up / Booster Sessions**

Following the completion of the fourteen sessions, the Lutra Group recommend addressing follow-up and on-going support for families, this includes linkage when necessary to community services. This also includes any plan for a 3 month, 6-month, 9 month, 12 month Follow-up or Booster Session.

At these sessions the families come together again. It is an opportunity for the families to reflect on the programmes impact on their lives, receive assistance in content areas unclear or problematic, to receive new educational or family skill building, participate in program evaluation and, moreover, reinforce the positive bonds they built with each other in the programme. The format for these sessions is flexible and determined by the needs of the families, the steering committee, facilitators, the evaluators and the funding prerequisites.

Le Chéile would encourage Steering Committees to plan for these Follow Up sessions or booster sessions accordingly at the Funding Application Stage as there may be a cost and time element associated with this. The Steering Committee should also put in place an agreed format for a Follow Up session or Booster Session and have a very clear aim for each session. Guidelines may need to be written by the Steering Committee around issues that may arise during a Booster or Follow up Session.

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Benefits of Follow Up/Booster Sessions	Potential drawbacks of Follow Up/Booster Sessions
Families can participation in programme evaluation, i.e. tracking the impact months on from completion. This can be useful for Steering Committees and future funding.	It may be confusing for participants and facilitators if there is no clear aim for what the session is about and if there is no identified leader of the session.
Facilitators and participants may enjoy and have fun!	Families or facilitators may not turn up. (Facilitators may be involved in other duties since the end of the programme and may have not the time to come to the booster or follow up session).
Families are given the opportunity to reflect on skills learnt and the impact it has had on their lives.	The SFP is designed to be a brief intervention and not a long term supportive service, may need to address this when deciding on the frequency and content of the reunion or booster session.
Reinforcement of bonds built during the programme.	Families may disclose concerning information at these sessions which would need to be addressed by the leader of the session and passed on to the relevant authorities.
Families receive some assistance with programme on material that they felt was unclear or problematic at time of doing the programme.	

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## **National Strengthening Families Programme Council of Ireland**

The Council was established in 2012, following the first National SFP Conference held in Dublin by Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force (BLDATF). At the initial meeting, a number of representatives from SFP sites joined BLDATF and Lutra Group USA to consider a joined up thinking approach to the ever-expanding implementation of SFP in Ireland. Recognising that just like SFP in our communities, we were stronger together than apart, it was agreed that there was a need for inter-regional collaboration, advocacy and the promotion of quality standards and fidelity to the best extent possible in order to progress SFP in Ireland. With that, it was further agreed to establish a Council which would work together to identify gaps, share learning and resources in the hope of helping to standardise and develop the implementation nationwide. Just like SFP

The Council has since evolved to include members from all 4 provinces and has adapted the SFP Training for Irish audiences; developed an information website for professionals and families; collating good practice recommendations; advocating for formal national support and funding of SFP family based prevention; and reviewing evaluation models.

For more information on the National SFP Council of Ireland or upcoming trainings, please visit [www.sfpcouncilireland.ie](http://www.sfpcouncilireland.ie)

### **Other useful resources:**

[www.lecheile.ie](http://www.lecheile.ie)

<http://www.strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org/>

<http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/>

<http://www.iyjs.ie/en/IYJS/Pages/NE08000086>

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the agencies involved for their time in discussing with us their experiences of planning, delivering and evaluating this programme since 2009. This Information Guide was revised in August 2016 to reflect the current role of Le Chéile as a funder with regards to the Strengthening Families Programme.

We have approached the development of this Information Guide as a model for best practice and ultimately with a view to assisting to develop the SFP in Ireland (alongside the numerous other agencies we have the pleasure of working alongside in SFP) for the benefit of families, communities and service providers nationally. We hope to continue to do this in a spirit of co-operation, interagency, value for money and with a view to developing positive outcomes and reporting structures to ensure the SFP continues as a program of choice for families involved in the Youth Justice System. If there are any omissions or addition you would like to make to this Information Guide or if agencies or personnel would like to be credited with any of the content they may have shared with us or wish to offer updates and/or suggestions, we would be happy to hear from you.