

Program Description

Families and Schools Together (F&ST)

Introduction:

Families and Schools Together (F&ST) is a proven parent involvement and family support program designed to help children succeed academically and socially. Facilitated by a team of professionals, the program is built around the principles that parents are the primary prevention agents in their children's lives. The activities have been developed based on family systems theory and other valid research to maximize impact for parents and their families. Positive connections are made by parents with school administration and staff that last throughout the child's school life. Families are introduced to community resources in a non-intimidating environment and a network of families is built through participation in the F&ST program. This network is continued with previous F&ST families through monthly follow up meetings called F&STWORKS.

Background:

F&ST was originally developed and implemented in Madison, Wisconsin by Dr. Lynn McDonald in 1988. The program is now available in 2000 schools internationally including the United States, Canada, Australia, Austria, England, and Germany. F&ST for elementary aged children has been successfully delivered in both the Bonne Bay and Bay St. George areas in the Western Region.

Purpose:

The purpose of F&ST is to foster feelings of affiliation, mutual respect, and reciprocity among the various players in the children's family, neighborhood, school, and community environments.

The **Goals** of the program are:

1. Enhance family functioning
 - Strengthen the parent-child relationship
 - Empower parents, to help them become the primary prevention agents for their children
2. Prevent the child from experiencing school failure
 - Improve the child's behavior and performance in school, both short-term and long-term
 - Empower the parents in their role as partners in the educational process
 - Increase the child's and family's feeling of affiliation toward their school
3. Prevent substance abuse by the child and the family
 - Increase the family's knowledge and awareness of substance abuse, and the impact of substance abuse upon child development
 - Link the family to appropriate assessment and treatment services as needed

4. Reduce the stress that parents and children experience from daily life situations
 - Develop an ongoing support group for parents of at-risk children
 - Link the family to appropriate community resources and services as needed
 - Build the self-esteem of each family member

Target Audience:

F&ST is a 2-year parent involvement and prevention model that supports children from birth to 12 years of age. There are four programs to support various age groups: Baby F&ST (0-3 Years), Early Childhood F&ST (3-5 Years), Elementary F&ST (5-9 Years), and Middle Years F&ST (9-12 Years).

Description of Activities:

F&ST consists of 8-10 weekly 2 ½ hour meetings for the whole family to attend and participate in. These sessions include opening and closing traditions, a family meal that is prepared in turn by each family in the group, structured family activities, parent mutual-support time, kids' time and parent-child one-on-one time with the child originally identified as needing the program. The program ends with a graduation ceremony, during which the school principal presents the participating families with a certificate of completion.

The core F&ST Team consists of a minimum of 4 partner roles: (1) a parent partner* from the school community; (2) a partner from a community-based public/not-for-profit mental health agency; (3) a partner from a community-based public/not-for-profit substance abuse agency; and (4) a school partner from the school staff. The F&ST Team operates as a trained "team of coaches". In addition, there are tasks that can be fulfilled by volunteers from the community (e.g., kitchen/meal helpers, childcare helpers, and recreation/activity helpers).

*After the first 8-week cycle, a graduate parent becomes the parent partner. S/he will be the team member to whom parents can relate most easily for support/assistance with program needs and so forth. The parent partner should be someone who is outgoing and assertive, comfortable approaching other parents by phone and face-to-face; a person who can advocate/support/assist parents with questions and concerns, as well as refer them to community resources as needed. This position is awarded a \$500 honorarium.

Following the eight week intensive program, parents have the option of participating in F&STWORKS, a 2-year follow-up program consisting of monthly parent meetings. F&STWORKS is designed to maintain an active social network for the parents and further develop parent community involvement.

Budget:

The following is a sample budget for the F&ST program based on the participation of 12 families

Item	Details	Estimated Cost
Small honoraria for volunteers	Volunteers are invited to participate in the evening meal, and are given certificates of appreciation at graduation	\$400
	1 Parent Partner @500 or 2 Parent Partners @ \$250 each	\$500
Travel for participants	Transportation for families (TAXI) provided if families don't have access to own transportation	\$768
Materials	Family baskets (50 per family) x 12 families	\$600
	Family flag materials/Kids Time supplies/craft supplies/graduation supplies	\$400
Food	Family Meal Preparation Incentive (\$40 per family x 12 families)	\$480
	Weekly Meals Supplements (250 per week x 7 weeks)	\$1,050
	Graduation Meal	\$250
FASTWORKS	22 months x \$25 per activity or month	\$550
Total		\$4,998

Evaluation:

F&ST has undergone several evaluations in both the United States and Canada. These evaluations indicate that the program is effective at improving children's social skills, decreasing externalizing behaviors and improving academic performance. It is also associated with improvements in family adaptability and parent's feelings of social isolation. The F&ST approach has been named "Best Practice in Preventing Substance use Problems Among Young People" (Health Canada, 2001).

Short term outputs:

- Families demonstrate positive communication strategies
- Increase in the number of positive interactions among family members.

- Pre-adolescents have improved behavior (home and school) and performance in school.
- Physical activities (for children and pre-adolescents) incorporated into program sessions.
- Healthy meals provided at each family session.

Long term outcomes:

- Prevention of school failure among pre-adolescents
- Pre-adolescents have improved behavior (home and school) and performance in school
- Prevention of addictions by pre-adolescent and family.
- Reduced impact of stress and social isolation on parent and pre-adolescent.
- Enhanced family bonds (cohesion) and communication skills that encourage family discussions

Indicators:

FAST uses national pre and post evaluation tools. In order to measure the effect of F&ST on participating families, several surveys are administered before the program begins and again after its conclusion.

- The Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS). This is a standardized scale designed to assess children's behavioral and emotional strengths.
- The Family Adaptability and Cohesiveness Evaluation Scale III (FACES III). This scale consists of two subscales, one of which measures family adaptability while the other measures family cohesiveness.
- Parental Involvement Survey (PIS). This survey consists of a series of questions that ask parents about their involvement in schools and community activities.

In addition, a Family Information Sheet is used to gather some basic information about families, and the Program Evaluation Form asks families some open-ended questions about the impact of F@ST. Finally, feedback from teachers and administration are also used to evaluate this program.

Requirements to Support Staff:

The human resource component consists of staff time for preparation and the delivery of this program. The Mental Health Promotion Consultant and the Addiction Prevention Consultant are also available for consultation and support throughout planning, facilitator training, participant recruitment, and running the program.

Sample Timeline/Action Plan:

Step One: Contact partners and establish team (e.g. a parent, a school professional, RCMP officer, health professionals, and other community partners). Recruit volunteers.

- Step Two: Bring team together for planning and assignment of responsibilities
- Step Two: Identify funding sources. May need to submit proposals and/or funding applications.
- Step Three: Recruit 10-12 families from the school are recruited to participate in the program. Complete home visits with each family. distribute and complete pre-program evaluation tools. Invite all members of the at-risk child's family are to attend a series of eight weekly team-led multi-family sessions.
- Step Four: Acquire program resources (meal vouchers, side meals, and snacks, family baskets).
- Step Five: Program delivery (weekly sessions).
- Step Six: Graduating families join FASTWORKS Group.
- Step Seven: Distribute and complete post-program evaluation tools.

Sample Elementary Program Session Agenda

5:30 PM	Welcome Hello's and Sing-Along Meal
6:15 PM	Scribbles Feelings Charades
6:45 PM	Buddy Time and Parent Group Kids' Time
7:30 PM	Special Play
7:45 PM	Picking a Winning Family
7:55 PM	Closing Circle / Rain
8:00 PM	Departure

The Session Schedule differs to include Making Family Flags on Week 1 and a Presentation of Substance Abuse Prevention on Week 5. A Graduation Ceremony and celebrations are included in the final session.