

# Families Facing Solutions Mental Health Module

## Introduction

Parenting is a rigorous task for any adult. It may be particularly challenging to parents diagnosed as having a mental illness. These parents each cope in unique ways with being a parent, having a psychiatric disability, and often living with the fear of losing custody of their children. Their children also have specific needs, which must be addressed in age-appropriate ways.

We believe that families desire to raise their children in the best way they possibly can. *Families Facing Solutions* is designed to support, educate, and empower parents to raise their children in a healthy way, based on the individual needs of each family.

*Families Facing Solutions* materials are designed to meet the needs of diverse family configurations. For example, the client perspective may be that of a single parent, grandparent, or any family living with specific challenges that greatly impact their lives and the safety of their children. Our solution-focused family education materials are written to promote the skills necessary for families to ensure positive change.

## Solution Building Blocks

The *Families Facing Solutions Mental Health Module* is a skills-oriented, solution-focused program designed for families with a parent who has a psychiatric disability and is at an elevated risk of having parenting difficulties. Each new lesson plan serves as a new Solution Building Block to help parents and their families develop skills to prepare them for the challenges of daily living and family life. The module's building block format interweaves the concepts of **family preparation, open communication, continuity, and wellness** to create a rich tapestry of healthful living.

Because each family is expected to utilize only the tools that address their specific needs, every Solution Building Block is self-sufficient. The worker and client collaborate to develop a Family Action Plan designed to include those Solution Building Blocks necessary to support each client-family to be the healthiest they can.

This Mental Health Module builds more effective family habits. Each skill is presented in a comprehensive Solution Building Block for the worker to share directly with the client-family. Each lesson incorporates hands-on experience with follow-up activities that include both observational and behavioral tasks. Reinforcement hand-out material provides the client-family with the ability to continue their work independently and at their own pace.

This module was developed with the assistance of five parents, each living with mental illness, each raising children who they loved dearly. These folks were participants in an Intensive Rehabilitation Program in Dutchess County, New York. They generously shared their parenting challenges and concerns in hopes of keeping their families together. They provided a window through which we can learn about their very specific parenting needs.

### **How to Use the Mental Health Module**

The Mental Health Module is designed to help you work together with the family to develop a systemic, strength-based plan of action toward healthier living. Each Solution Building Block provides all the information you need to complete that individual skill-building exercise.

#### **Solution-Building Block Format:**

Each Solution Building Block follows an easy-to-use lesson plan template. This allows each block to be used either in connection with other blocks or on its own.

1. **Objective:** the skills clients/families will attain at the completion of each Solution Building Block
2. **Materials:** necessary materials to complete each lesson. This helps the worker prepare for each encounter.
3. **Motivating Activity:** brief exercises to introduce the concept of the lessons. Often references to, and discussions about, previous blocks are woven in to further engage client participation.
4. **Procedure:** collaborative steps for the worker and family members to discover what each specific family needs to know so they can develop that lesson's skills. Educational information provides family with insights to enhance their skills. Activities engage each participating family member toward collaborating on strength-based change.
5. **Culminating Activity:** helps to reinforce the materials covered during the session. It provides an opportunity to discuss any questions and make adjustments to reinforce families particular skills.
6. **Follow-up Activities and Future Considerations:** provide the worker with additional ideas to further reinforce the lesson skills in several of the building blocks.
7. **Handouts:** serve as reminders to the family participants so they can continue to develop their skills between meetings. Handouts are reviewed with the client at the end of each lesson and signed by each participating

family member. These tools are often placed on family refrigerators or folders for easy reference. Handouts are downloadable on the [www.familiesfacingsolutions.org](http://www.familiesfacingsolutions.org) website.

## Getting Started

The first two lessons help the worker establish a scheduled family meeting where family members come together to collaborate on becoming more prepared for challenges that might arise. Here everyone involved can begin to explore the subsequent available lessons and negotiate activities. Empowering our clients by engaging them as collaborators in designing an individual map for positive change is the magic of the *Families Facing Solutions Mental Health Module*.

Solution Building Block 1: Family Action Plan helps client families recognize their existing abilities and engages them to explore ways to maintain a safe environment. Once stability is introduced, Solution Building Block 2: Family Councils, guides the family to establish a scheduled meeting. During a family council meeting, the worker and the family review the Solution Building Blocks and determine which lessons would support the family's positive growth. All family members should have a voice in determining the family plan

### **Solution Building Block Themes:**

Focus on the areas of greatest need.

### Preparation

Solution Building Block 1: Family Action Plan

Solution Building Block 2: Family Councils

Solution Building Block 3: Alert Signal/Warning Flag

Solution Building Block 4: Designating the Family Support Person: The Family Ally

Solution Building Block 5: S.O.S. Letter

### Open Communication

Solution Building Block 6: What Do I Tell My Child?

Solution Building Block 7: Addressing the Child's Concerns About a Parent's Medication

Solution Building Block 8: Information Please: What Happens To My Parent In the Hospital?

Solution Building Block 9: My Friends Call You Crazy

Solution Building Block 10: Developing Children's Problem Solving Skills

Solution Building Block 11: Engaging Helping Professionals: Let's Talk

Solution Building Block 12: Working with the Child's School: I'm My Child's Advocate

Solution Building Block 13: Tracking Conversations: Focusing on the Road to Independence

## Continuity

- Solution Building Block 14: Kids' Journals: All About Me
- Solution Building Block 15: Hear's My Voice
- Solution Building Block 16: Sounds of Home
- Solution Building Block 17: Ensuring the Continuum: Working with Foster Care Parents
- Solution Building Block 18: Parent/Foster Parent Buddy System
- Solution Building Block 19: Preparation for Family Visits
- Solution Building Block 20: ReBonding: Hello, It's Me Again
- Solution Building Block 21: Bonding: The Ties That Bind

## Wellness

- Solution Building Block 22: Stress Reduction: Gimme a Break
- Solution Building Block 23: Relaxation Techniques
- Solution Building Block 24: Sanctuary: My Safe Haven
- Solution Building Block 25: Support for the Anchor Parent
- Solution Building Block 26: Respite Care: Prevention Instead of Intervention
- Solution Building Block 27: Making Space for Ups and Downs
- Solution Building Block 28: Checking My Successes Chart
- Solution Building Block 29: Nutrition: Promoting Healthy Heart Smart Snacks
- Solution Building Block 30: My Three Wishes