



NAMI Homefront Education Program

NAMI Homefront was developed to meet the unique needs of families of our Service Members and Veterans who are living with mental health conditions. It is a six-session adaptation of the evidence-based NAMI Family-to-Family program. NAMI Family-to-Family is taught by and for family members who have a relative living with mental illness.

NAMI began offering NAMI Family-to-Family in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities around the country in 2000, to address the emotional toll of loving a Service Member or Veteran with a mental health condition and the impact those symptoms can have on everyone around them. NAMI uses a peer education model to ensure love and respect for everyone involved – the individual living with the illness and the family members.

NAMI Homefront is based on the same core components of the other NAMI programs which have been extensively tested and found to be highly effective across the country. These include:

- recognition of mental illness as an ongoing traumatic event for the individual and the family
- sensitivity to the subjective emotional issues faced by family caregivers and others in the family
- recognition of the need to improve the day-to-day challenges of care and symptom management
- gaining confidence and stamina for what can be a life-long role of family understanding and support
- empowerment of family members as effective advocates for their Service Members and Veterans



NAMI's experience has shown that the process of emotional learning and practical insight for families occurs most effectively in a guided group process where family members are in a class together. This program will also utilize technology to allow families to connect virtually in classes online.

The NAMI Homefront Program includes the following components:

- Six 2.5 hour sessions of instructional material, discussions and interactive exercises which may be delivered as a series of consecutive weekly classes, or twice per week on consecutive weeks (e.g., twice on Saturday with a break for lunch or Tuesday and Thursday for three consecutive weeks, etc.) to accommodate busy schedules.
- Information on how to access programs, benefits and resources for Service Members and Veterans are included in a General Resources section of the NAMI Homefront program manual
- A section of the NAMI website will be dedicated to disseminating information, including informational videos that can be viewed online, as well as links to a multitude of existing educational and support resources available through the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Center for the Study of Post-Traumatic Stress and many others.
- An online version of the NAMI Homefront program will be available in 2015.

The program includes an evaluation process to both build an evidence base on the effectiveness of the program and also to help ensure that the program continually delivers best practices and current information most needed by the families of Service Members and Veterans.

NAMI Homefront is designed specifically for spouses/partners, parents, siblings, adult children and others who love a Service Member or Veteran who is dealing with the complex challenges presented by a mental health condition. The goals of NAMI Homefront are to:

- provide the fundamental information necessary for the family to understand what the Service Member or Veteran is experiencing
- help the family cope with the impact that mental illness has on the person living with the illness and the entire family.
- provide tools for the family to use even after completing the program that will assist them in responding as effectively as possible to challenging situations and crises
- help the family members learn to take care of their own needs in addition to those of their family.

Descriptions of the six classes are included on the following pages.

Program Curriculum

Class 1: Introduction to Family Education

Special features of the course; learning about the normative stages of our emotional reactions to the challenges presented by mental illness in the family; the belief system and principles that NAMI programs are based on; recognizing that mental illnesses are fundamentally biological disorders; addressing the challenges presented by the stigma around mental illness, specifically in the military culture.

Class 2: The Biology of Mental Illness and Getting a Diagnosis

Overview of development and functions of key brain areas; research on functional and structural brain changes related to mental illness and brain injury; overview of the diagnostic process; critical periods in illness development and symptom management; strategies in development of a Crisis File and sharing participant personal stories.

Class 3: Understanding Trauma and Overview of Diagnoses

Discussion of trauma from the perspective of the general public, then specifically about various types of trauma experienced by military personnel and their families; emphasize a picture of normal reactions to abnormal events and normalizing the fact that there is always some level of residue associated with exposure to trauma; overview of the types and subtypes of some of the major mental illnesses including mood episodes and mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, co-occurring brain disorder and addictive disorders.

Class 4: Treatment Systems and Services

Overview of the systems that may be involved in the Service Member's treatment including the Department of Defense Military Health System, the Department of Veterans Affairs Health system and civilian mental healthcare systems; overview of different type of healthcare providers of mental health services; overview of different types of therapy and treatment, including medications; emphasize the importance of working collaboratively (the Service Member, the healthcare provider and the family) to achieve the best outcomes; suggestions and tips on communicating with the healthcare provider and the importance of advocating for the needs of the Service Member and the Family.

Class 5: Crisis Preparation and Communication Skills

Acknowledge the impact of mental illness on each family member and the Service Member; learning to separate the symptoms and behavior from the individual; loving the person behind the illness; learning various skills that can be used to improve day to day communications within the family as well as during episodes of crisis; communication skills, problem solving skills, tips for handling challenging behavior, crisis preparation and response, developing a relapse plan

Class 6: Family Roles, Recovery and Self-Care

The unique challenges of various family roles (spouse/partner vs. parent vs. sibling, etc.); the importance of self-care in being an effective family caregiver; discussion of any unresolved needs of participants; emphasize building an advocacy team for the Service Member; invitation to join NAMI in the fight to end discrimination and ensure access to appropriate treatment services; evaluations and certificates

For additional information about the program contact namieducation@nami.org