

FRIENDS - FOR LIFE -

in your **school** Parent Information

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What is FRIENDS?

FRIENDS is the world's leading program for fighting childhood anxiety and building resilience to help your child manage worry and depression both now and in later life. Developed in Australia, it is the only such program acknowledged by the World Health Organization for its 8 years of comprehensive evaluation and practice. Hundreds of Australian schools have used the program and by the end of 2005 well over 100,000 children will have completed a FRIENDS program worldwide. The program was updated late 2004 and early 2005 ensuring it remains at the cutting edge of excellence in anxiety prevention and resiliency building.

FRIENDS takes only 10 sessions to complete and is able to be run by your school's regular teachers in normal class times. The program promotes self-esteem, problem-solving skills, psychological resilience, self-expression, and building positive relationships with peers and adults. It is a positive, fun learning experience that does not involve any clinical assessment or diagnosis and avoids labelling children as anxious or different. There is no mention throughout the program of topics such as depression, suicide, drug abuse or violence.

Why combat anxiety through schools?

Research has shown that up to a quarter of 8-year-olds and 15% of teenagers may experience some form of anxiety disorder (typified by an excessive amount of worry about future or past difficulties that interferes with day-to-day life activities). These disorders are often difficult to detect and if left unattended may develop over years into adult anxiety disorders or, in some cases, clinical depression leading to thoughts of suicide.

Why exactly worry and depression seems to be an increasingly common feature of our modern society is as yet not understood. Perhaps it is the changing nature of work and family and its added burdens on parenting, or the increased and sometimes intrusive nature of the communication revolution. Our newspapers, televisions and computers today supply us with an unending stream of disturbing images and challenging knowledge about our entire globe.

What we do know is that education for emotional health needs to start early. We can no longer rely on a simple, happy and protected childhood spent growing up in a world only as big as our local neighbourhood. Today's internet-friendly

schools bring ever more information to children and teenagers about how big and complicated the adult world can be. And while being worried about certain things is a normal part of growing up, excessive worry can lead to significant mental distress both in childhood and on into adulthood.

Early intervention and prevention through the school system will help children cope with the worries and stresses of puberty and adolescence, and help prevent the development of thought patterns that ultimately may lead to such self-damaging behaviour as civil disobedience, aggression, negativism, alcohol and drug abuse, and in its extreme, suicide.

How do we know FRIENDS works?

FRIENDS is a cognitive behavioural program designed to combat anxiety and depression by teaching specific life skills. It is based on a firm psychological model and has been rigorously tested both in Australia and overseas across a range of age groups and ethnic and social backgrounds.

In simple terms this research says that up to 80% of children showing signs of anxiety disorder no longer display that disorder for up to six years after completing the program. For children who are not clinically anxious, FRIENDS significantly increases their level of self-esteem while reducing their feelings of worry and depression.

What happens in a FRIENDS group?

Teachers guide students through a series of class-based activities designed to teach them how to deal with worrying situations through being prepared, devising self-help strategies, rewarding themselves, and seeking support. Each session they will be presented with a home-based activity to complete before the next FRIENDS session, and at the end of the program will be able to keep their special FRIENDS workbooks for future reference. Parents have an opportunity to help their children and learn more about what they are experiencing in the FRIENDS program by attending two parent evenings which may be arranged by the school.

a school-based **resilience building** program

Please contact your school for further information or go to www.friendsinfo.net

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