

FRIENDS for life

A proven anxiety and depression prevention programme, based on social emotional learning

Aims and Objectives

The "Friends for Life" programme is a structured, evidence-based intervention designed to promote emotional resilience, social skills, and mental well-being, particularly in children and adolescents. It is often implemented in school settings to teach coping strategies for anxiety and depression. It is part of a wider suite of programmes targeting all age groups.

Implementation highlights

- **The programme:** interventions are delivered in whole-class group sessions by a trained practitioner. Children learn coping strategies through interactive activities such as stories, games, videos, and exercises, with some home activities involving family members to reinforce learning and practise new skills.
- **The training:** delivered by psychologists or other health professionals alongside teachers. Practitioners receive two days of specialised training and ongoing supervision from an accredited FRIENDS trainer.
- **What children learn:** To cope with their own emotions and understand others' feelings, develop positive thinking, emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills, build confidence and self-esteem, embrace happiness, bravery, and smooth transitions into adolescence

At a glance



Univ. Prevention



Target audience
Children aged 8-9



Delivery settings
School



Objectives

- build resilience,
- enhance social and emotional skills
- develop coping strategies



Costs
Family and Community licenses are available. The 3-year license cost for a school is AUD 3,000.00 per school.



Professionals involved:
Psychologists or other allied health professionals, alongside a teacher.



Leading organization:
FRIENDS Resilience



Countries
Originally developed in Australia, now implemented in 28 countries worldwide (8 European countries)

How this practice be implemented?

You can find an implementation guide [here](#); key points are:

1. Obtain the FRIENDS license package
2. Complete facilitator training
3. Organize courses for the target group and setting
4. Deliver the programme through trained practitioners

Get started

- English [materials and resources](#)
- [Evidence](#) of programme effectiveness
- Find a full report of the programme at <https://friendsresilience.org/>



Key takeaways



- Implemented in 28 countries across 5 continents
- Train-the-Trainer protocols enables cost-effective scale-up
- Validated cross-cultural implementation.

Supporting policies



In **Ireland**, it is Implemented in collaboration with national education and psychological support services, including National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Support Service.

What makes this a good practice?

key features

- Evidence-based CBT programme recognised by the WHO (8)
- Strengthens long term social-emotional skills
- Scalable school- and community-based model across age

Impact: does it work?

Effectiveness

FRIENDS programmes reduce anxiety and depression symptoms, with positive effects sustained up to 12 months and, in some studies, up to 3 years (2,3,4). One study found that the proportion of children reporting elevated anxiety levels decreased from 18.8% before the programme to 10.2% after completion (3), with further improvements observed over time. The programme also strengthens resilience, emotional regulation, self-confidence, and social-emotional skills (4).

Efficiency

Train the Trainer' protocols to enable a cost-effective dissemination of the programmes.

Evidence base

The programmes backed by eight RCT showing sustained reductions in anxiety and depression symptoms (2, 6,7). It is based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and it is recognised by the WHO for preventing anxiety and depression (8). Grounded in CASEL's social and emotional learning framework, the programme is supported by over 40 research studies (2,3).

Reach: who can benefit?

Equity and access

The programme embraces cultural diversity and is implemented in schools as a universal intervention, ensuring broad and inclusive access for all children and adolescents.

Transferability and scalability

FRIENDS Resilience has developed a national and international network of Licensed Partners who use the FRIENDS programmes in 28 countries worldwide.

Integration: keeping it going and working across sectors

Sustainability

Licensed Partners undertake retraining every three years to update their knowledge regarding innovations in the field. School-based delivery further supports sustainability by embedding the programme within existing institutional structures rather than relying on stand-alone provision.

Intersectorality

The programme adopts an intersectoral approach involving the education, health and community sectors. Teachers, education professionals and allied health professionals are trained to deliver the programme in schools, health services and community organisations. Depending on local capacity and implementation arrangements, delivery may be led by trained school staff or by external health professionals.

Engagement and innovation: listening to young people and adapting over time

Youth participation

The programme promotes active participation of children through interactive, school-based activities that strengthen emotional awareness, problem-solving, peer interaction, and resilience skills.

Intergenerational / life-course approach

The FRIENDS suite adopts a life-course approach through age-specific, CBT-based programmes designed to strengthen resilience and mental wellbeing from childhood through adulthood (including Fun FRIENDS, FRIENDS for Life, My FRIENDS Youth, and Adult Resilience).

Gender responsiveness

The FRIENDS programme is a universal, gender-neutral intervention: content, activities, and delivery format are identical for all participants, regardless of gender. The programme does not differentiate materials or strategies by sex, and the available evidence base has not identified significant differential outcomes between boys and girls in anxiety reduction or skill acquisition.

References and additional tools to favour translation

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