

Preventing and Treating Anxiety in Children and Youth

What is FRIENDS for Life?

FRIENDS for Life is an anxiety prevention and intervention program developed in Australia by Dr. Paula Barrett, a clinical child psychologist. It is a cognitive-behavioral intervention which addresses the cognitive, physiological and behavioral processes that are seen to interact in the development, maintenance and experience of anxiety.

FRIENDS helps children and youth cope with feelings of fear, worry, and depression by building resilience and self-esteem and teaching cognitive, behavioral, and emotional skills in a simple, well-structured format.

FRIENDS is about preventing childhood anxiety and depression through the building of emotional resilience. It aims to reduce the incidence of serious psychological disorders, emotional distress and impairment in social functioning by teaching children and young people how to cope with, and manage, anxiety both now and in later life.

FRIENDS can be implemented by mental health professionals or school counselors as an early intervention strategy with groups of children or youth at risk or presenting with anxiety concerns. It can also be implemented by teachers as a universal prevention strategy within elementary, middle, and high school classrooms.

Why is FRIENDS so important?

Anxiety is the most prevalent mental health disorder among children and youth. Anxiety disorders are characterized by a persistent pattern of excessive worry and uneasiness that causes distress and interferes with healthy development and functioning in multiple areas of life. Anxiety significantly interferes with a child's ability to confidently handle everyday situations, including interpersonal relationships, social competence, peer relations and school adjustment.

Anxiety disorders are often difficult to detect, and if left untreated, may develop over the years into a chronic adult anxiety disorder/s or, in some cases, clinical depression leading to thoughts of suicide. It is therefore crucial that anxiety prevention and intervention begin early, and that children and their families develop effective strategies to deal with worry, stress and change.

How do we know FRIENDS works?

FRIENDS is used in schools and mental health clinics throughout the world and is unique in its commitment to evidence-based research support for all aspects of the program. FRIENDS is the only childhood anxiety prevention and intervention program acknowledged by the World Health Organization for its more than 12 years of comprehensive validation and assessment across several countries and languages using rigorous randomized control studies.

In simple terms, this research says that up to 80% of children showing signs of an anxiety disorder no longer display those signs 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.

How can I find out more about FRIENDS?

Austin Resilience Development Inc. is an accredited Pathways Health and Research Centre training partner, and the exclusive provider of FRIENDS for Life training in Ontario, Quebec, the Maritimes, the Northwest Territories, the Yukon, and Nunavut. Information about professional training and certification to deliver the FRIENDS for Life program to children and youth is available on our website at www.friendsrt.com or by calling 613-692-3764.