

BC FRIENDS at School

What is FRIENDS?

FRIENDS is an evidence-based, classroom delivered program designed to reduce anxiety and build resiliency in children. FRIENDS was first introduced in BC schools in support of the province's Five Year Child and Youth Mental Health Plan. FRIENDS is now part of BC's Ten Year Mental Health and Substance Abuse Plan – *Healthy Minds, Healthy People (2010)*.

Anxiety is the most common mental health problem among children today. Approximately 25,000 children in BC experience clinical levels of anxiety.

Who is FRIENDS for?

In BC, FRIENDS is implemented as a preventative program that focuses on increasing the emotional health of all children in a classroom. It is available to students at three developmentally significant stages: grades K-1 (Fun FRIENDS), 4-5 (FRIENDS for Life), and 6-7 (My FRIENDS Youth).



Why address anxiety in school?

FRIENDS programming is designed for universal, as opposed to targeted delivery in BC classrooms. Learning FRIENDS skills together as a group increases positive peer interaction, leads to greater understanding of self, and increases empathy for others. Universal implementation also helps decrease stigma, normalize feelings of stress and anxiety, and create supportive, solution-oriented environments. FRIENDS does not include clinical assessment or diagnosis and avoids labelling students as anxious or different.

FRIENDS' Program Delivery

Teachers and counselors who attend a one-day certification training are eligible to deliver FRIENDS in their classrooms and receive program materials (leaders' manual, student workbooks, and additional program resources) at no cost. Training sessions are hosted by school districts or independent schools and facilitated by certified FRIENDS trainers provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. **There is no cost to schools or districts unless staff release time is required.**

Why F-R-I-E-N-D-S?

Each letter of the FRIENDS acronym represents a set of skills designed to teach life-long strategies for coping with difficult situations and managing anxiety. Use of these skills contributes to the reduction of serious psychological disorders, emotional distress, and impairment in social functioning.

Used in schools and clinics throughout the world, FRIENDS is the only childhood anxiety prevention program acknowledged by the World Health Organization for more than a decade of practice and research evaluation.

FRIENDS at Home

BC FRIENDS and the FORCE Society for Kids' Mental Health have partnered to develop an online parent program that provides FRIENDS information to families. Resources include videos of FRIENDS in action at home and school, a parent information workshop, downloadable activities, tips sheets, other mental health resources, and much more.

www.friendsparentprogram.com

FRIENDS in BC Schools

FRIENDS is facilitated by classroom teachers or school counselors using hands-on, peer-supported learning. There are 10+ sessions that address emotional awareness, relaxation, problem solving, self-management, goal setting, interpersonal communication, support networks, and more. Optional take-home activities reinforce FRIENDS concepts outside of school.

FRIENDS and BC Curriculum

FRIENDS aligns with the core competencies of BC's Education Plan and provides teachers with a valuable framework for addressing thinking, communication, and personal and social competencies.

Thinking – FRIENDS fosters the development of critical, creative, and reflective thinking skills, habits of mind, and metacognitive awareness.

Communication – FRIENDS provides opportunities for students to exchange ideas through discussion, exploration of non-verbal communication, conflict resolution, and written expression.

Personal & Social – FRIENDS encourages the development of positive personal and cultural identities through the exploration of strengths and limitations, feelings about self and others, choices, and goals for the future.

Core Competencies



FRIENDS and Social and Emotional Learning

FRIENDS teaches specific skills to target the five competencies identified by the *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)*.

www.casel.org



Research shows that improving children's social and emotional skills directly benefits their ability to learn and apply cognitive skills.

FRIENDS skills also promote the five qualities of Heart-Mind Well-Being developed by the *Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education* and the *Human Early Learning Partnership*.

www.dalailamacenter.org/about/heart-mind



BC FRIENDS Program website:

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/friends.htm

Email:

mcf.cymhfriends@gov.bc.ca

