

## What is FRIENDS?

FRIENDS is an evidence-based anxiety prevention and resiliency-building program that has been offered in BC schools since 2004. Developed in Australia, this social and emotional learning program helps young people manage anxiety now and later in life. FRIENDS promotes self-esteem, problem solving skills, psychological resilience, self-expression, and positive relationships with peers and adults.

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

(Dalai Lama Centre for Peace and Education  
<http://dalailamacenter.org/about/heart-mind>)

## Childhood Anxiety

Although everyone experiences anxiety at some point in their lives, too much can lead to significant mental distress for both children and adults. Problematic anxiety is typified by an excessive amount of worry that interferes with daily activities. If left unattended, this level of anxiety may lead to more serious psychological disorders.

Recent research in Canada has shown that close to 13% of young people ages 4 to 14 years may experience mental health disorders at any given time – that's as many as 84,000 children. In BC, the estimated number of children affected by anxiety disorders is approximately 4%, or more than 25,000 children.

(Waddell C, Shepherd CA, Schwartz C, Barican J. *Child and youth mental disorders: Prevalence and evidence-based interventions*. Vancouver, BC: Children's Health Policy Centre, Simon Fraser University; 2014.)

FRIENDS helps children gain valuable skills such as self-management, self-awareness, positive communication, empathy, and responsible decision making.

## Early Intervention & Prevention

Education for emotional health needs to start early. Early intervention and prevention through the school system helps children cope with worry and stress, fulfill their potential, and prevent the development of thought patterns which may lead to self-damaging behaviour such as aggression, criminal activity, substance abuse and in its extreme, suicide.

## Why address anxiety in BC classrooms?

The FRIENDS curriculum is taught to all students in participating BC classrooms. Learning the skills together 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 involve clinical assessment or diagnosis and avoids labelling students as anxious or different.



## How do we know FRIENDS works?

FRIENDS benefits all students by increasing their level of self-esteem and reducing their feelings of worry and depression.

FRIENDS is based on a theoretical model that combines research-based cognitive-behavioural techniques. Over two decades of rigorous testing using randomized controlled trials across a range of age groups and ethnic and social backgrounds has shown FRIENDS to be effective for up to 6 years after initial exposure.

The World Health Organization recognizes FRIENDS as an effective anxiety prevention program and it is currently used in several countries world-wide. BC continues to be one of the world leaders of universal school-based FRIENDS implementation.

## FRIENDS in BC Classrooms

FRIENDS lessons and activities are designed to teach students how to deal with worrying situations by being prepared, rewarding themselves, and seeking support. FRIENDS takes a minimum of 10 sessions to complete and is a positive, fun learning experience.

### The FRIENDS program skills include:

- Understanding and recognizing feelings in self and others
- Facing challenges
- Learning to relax and self-regulate
- Recognizing helpful and unhelpful thoughts
- Learning from role models
- Building support teams
- Solving problems and resolving conflict

FRIENDS aligns with BC's curriculum, providing teachers with tools to address the three core competencies (personal and social, thinking, and communication) which contribute to pro-social behaviours and a positive school culture.

FRIENDS skills and concepts also complement and align well with other Social and Emotional Learning programs taking place in BC classrooms.

## 3 FRIENDS Program Levels in BC



**Fun FRIENDS**  
(Kindergarten and Grade 1)



**FRIENDS for Life**  
(Grade 4 and 5)



**MY FRIENDS YOUTH**  
(Grade 6 and 7)

## Is training required?

Prior to delivering FRIENDS to their students, classroom teachers, counselors, and other educators are required to complete a one-day certification training provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

## Is there a cost?

FRIENDS training and related materials (leader's manual and sample student workbook) are provided to educators by MCFD at no cost. Each participating student is also supplied with a workbook. There is no cost to children or their families.

FRIENDS has been delivered in all BC school districts as well as many independent and First Nations schools.

## FRIENDS at Home

BC FRIENDS and the FORCE Society for Kids' Mental Health have partnered to offer parent workshops in addition to developing 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 at: [www.friendsparentprogram.com](http://www.friendsparentprogram.com)

## Contact Us

To learn more about FRIENDS in BC, visit our website at:

[www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental\\_health/friends.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/friends.htm)

For additional information, please contact:

[mcf.cymhfriends@gov.bc.ca](mailto:mcf.cymhfriends@gov.bc.ca)

