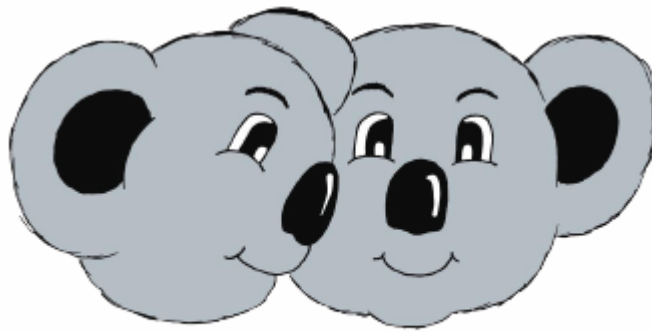


INTRODUCTION TO FUN FRIENDS

FUN FRIENDS



The first program in the world to help children to develop emotionally and socially!

Fun Friends is the latest program developed by Dr Paula Barrett - author of the world famous FRIENDS for Life program. Designed specifically for four, five and six year old children, Fun Friends teaches emotional resilience that will stay with young children for life, and teaches practical, useful strategies for coping with stress, worry, fear and sadness. With Fun Friends, young children will gain the emotional and social intelligence necessary to excel during their school years.

The FUN FRIENDS program:

Building social and emotional competency in preschool children

Due to the large evidence-base and extensive results indicating that the FRIENDS for Life program for children and youth is effective in reducing anxiety and emotional distress, the next logical step is to implement and evaluate the FRIENDS program at an even younger age. It is necessary to extend our understanding of anxiety into early childhood because preschool children rapidly develop at their young age, and there is potential for effective interventions that may not be possible at older ages (McEwan, 2003).

Serious emotional disturbance can develop before the age of 6 and may interfere with crucial emotional, cognitive, and physical development, presaging a lifetime of problems in schools and at home (Costello, Angold, Keeler, 1999). Therefore, we must begin to intervene before the onset of disorders, and begin teaching children social and emotional skills to increase their competence and wellbeing.

Research has suggested that the preschool years are essential for building social-emotional skills (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Children who are socially and emotionally well adjusted do better at school, have increased confidence, have good relationships, take on and persist at challenging tasks and communicate well (National Research Council and Institutes of Medicine, 2000).

The Fun FRIENDS program is a positive program for preschool children that focuses on increasing social-emotional competence and wellness. The program uses a family based approach by actively involving children, parents, teachers, and schools in the intervention process. Children, parents, and teachers are taught developmentally sensitive cognitive-behavioural techniques to cope with and manage worry, and conquer challenges and adversity.

Research suggests that clinically relevant interventions, such as FUN FRIENDS, can increase positive outcomes for children at risk by creating a “resilient mind-set” (Brooks & Goldstein, 2005). The importance of a resilient mind-set is based on the perception that no child is immune from pressure in the fast-paced, stress-filled environment. Even children who are not faced with significant adversity or trauma may experience the pressures around them (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005).

The Fun FRIENDS program is based on this conception – that the *majority* of children will feel pressure at some stage in their life and it is important to provide these children with the effective coping skills needed to “bounce back” in those situations (e.g. teaching children how to be brave, problem solving, positive thinking, relaxation and self-soothing skills, facing challenges).

The FUN FRIENDS Program teaches young children, parents, and teachers the following skills:

- How to relax and self soothe
- How to regulate emotions
- How to understand emotions in yourself and other people
- How to be kind and empathetic
- Social and emotional skills
- How to make friends and share
- How to be brave and try new things
- How to build self esteem
- How to deal with conflict
- Positive coping strategies
- Easy to learn strategies on how to change negative “red thinking” into positive “green thinking”.

FUN FRIENDS Groups

You can bring your young children aged 4,5, or 6 to Pathways Health and Research Centre and a highly trained child psychologist will do the FUN FRIENDS program over 12 weeks (one and a half hours per week) with your child. There is a maximum of eight children per group. Parents also learn the skills. It involves fun and easy games and activities.

FUN FRIENDS Training

As a teacher you can participate in FUN FRIENDS training, held throughout the year in capital cities nationwide. People who have been trained on how to run FUN FRIENDS can then implement the program at their school/kindergarten and make the program part of the curriculum to develop emotional and social skills in young children.

Some testimonials from people who have done FUN FRIENDS

Our whole family benefited from Jemma's participation in the FUN FRIENDS Program. All our girls enjoy this and sometimes we extend it to discussing how we could have handled things better. For me as a parent, I valued the program because it affirmed things we were trying to do but also gave them more structure and purpose. For example, as a teacher, I also found it interesting and helpful in seeing how at an early education level, personal development can be taught, and saw the importance of a team effort with the parents to make the most of the learning experience."

- Jennifer and Jemma

"I would like to say how great the FRIENDS program was and how beneficial it was to my son. We all enjoyed the program and doing the activities. I spoke with many parents and they too felt it was well worth while"

- Belinda

"My son participated in the FUN FRIENDS program through his preschool. He thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of the program. Each week he was provided with fun, age-appropriate strategies to assist him in becoming more emotionally resilient. It was amazing to see his attitudes changing as the program progressed. Often, they were ideas I had attempted to implement at home, but the FUN FRIENDS program offered a practical approach which was apparently very easy for my son to relate to and subsequently implement. I can highly recommend the FUN FRIENDS program to other children and parents."

-Tony and Pauline

"I was impressed to see how quickly my daughter was able to grasp the strategies she had learnt in the sessions and apply them in everyday situations - often without my prompting. Through the use of child-friendly language (e.g. talking about red thoughts and green thoughts) and fun play-based sessions, my four-year-old daughter was able to grasp quite abstract concepts relating to thoughts and feelings. One of the longest lasting strategies my daughter continued to use after the program had concluded was her desire to share (talk about) our happy experiences for the day before going to sleep each night. She really enjoyed that special time each night and so did I!"

- Yolanda

Support for the FUN FRIENDS Program and the effectiveness of Intervention Program's for young children.

James Heckman - A Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences - believes that early social and emotional experiences of very young children affect their future growth and potential. Heckman explains that the preschool years in particular, are vitally important for skill formation. According to Dr Heckman:

*"Early childhood interventions of high quality have lasting effects on learning and motivation. As a society, we cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age- a time when it may be too late to intervene. Since learning is a dynamic process, it is most effective when it begins at a young age and continues into adulthood."
(Heckman, 2000)*

"An important lesson to draw from the entire literature on successful early interventions is that it is the social skills and motivation of the child that are more easily altered – not IQ. These social and emotional skills affect performance in school and in the workplace. We too often have a bias toward believing that only cognitive skills are of fundamental importance to success in life. Our best long term investment is human capital investment in the form of emotional, social, and cognitive education. To date we are failing the first two areas of development in our educational systems." (Heckman, 2005)

As many as 20% of preschool aged children in the general population show moderate to clinically significant levels of emotional and behavioural problems. (Lavigne, et al., 1996)

About the Author

Professor Paula Barrett is a prolific researcher and practitioner in the field of clinical child psychology and currently adjunct Professor at the School of Education, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. She is also director of the Pathways Health and Research Centre which she established in 2003. Professor Barrett is internationally acclaimed for her work in the field of child and adolescent anxiety. She published the world's first family treatment control trial for childhood anxiety in 1995, and her 1996 paper on the treatment of anxiety disorders in children and adolescents is highly cited and is in the foreground of empirically supported, evidence-based practices. She has also made significant advances in mapping the psychological adjustment of young non-English speaking migrants and refugees to Australia through the development and validation of culturally sensitive adjustment resources for families from China and Balken States. Professor Barrett authored and evaluated the well-known Coping Koala anxiety treatment protocol during her doctorate in 1993, which she has since turned into the FRIENDS program — now recognised worldwide as best practice for the treatment and prevention of anxiety in children and adolescents. Since 1996 she has attracted over \$1.7million in university research funding and continues to lead a highly productive research group as well as coordinate and liaise with the many ongoing research and clinical trials now underway with FRIENDS in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Asia and North America. Her research group has published more controlled trials for childhood anxiety than any other group in the world. Collectively, this body of literature has had a significant global impact not only for the treatment of childhood anxiety, but in research and public policy arenas as well.

In addition to her research being published in numerous prestigious international peer-reviewed journals, she has also written numerous book chapters and presented keynote addresses at national and international conferences. In 2005, Professor Barrett published the book *Interventions That Work with Children and Adolescents*, which she edited and wrote together with Professor Tom Ollendick. This book is widely used around the world in postgraduate programs both in psychology and psychiatry departments. Professor Barrett has an established international reputation as a researcher in the area of intervention for children with psychological problems. She was the recipient of the National Australian Association for Cognitive and Behaviour Therapy Early Career Award for her research and clinical innovation in the field of clinical psychology in 1998, and the National Australian Psychological Society Award for outstanding scholarship in the discipline of psychology in 1999. Professor Barrett received an Australia Day Achievement Award in 2007, for her outstanding services to the Brisbane community through the FRIENDS program and Pathways Health and Research Centre. She has successfully supervised 24 Honours, 19 Masters, and 10 PhD students to completion of their postgraduate degrees, each one of whom is, in turn, making an important contribution to the wellbeing of families and to the advance of research in the field of clinical child psychology.

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