



INFORMATION LEAFLET ON THE 'FRIENDS' PROGRAMMES

"Fun FRIENDS", "FRIENDS for Life" and "FRIENDS for Youth" are evidence-based anxiety prevention and resilience building programme designed for use in schools. Developed by Dr Paula Barrett in Australia, the programmes are designed to teach students the skills required to manage their thoughts, emotions and body responses to life stresses. The programmes also seek to develop self-esteem and teach coping skills in a simple and structured way. It is a positive, fun learning experience that does not require any clinical assessment or diagnosis and avoids labelling young people as anxious or different.

"FRIENDS for Life" consists of 10 sessions plus 2 booster sessions. During these sessions pupils are guided through a series of class-based activities which were built around the core themes of the programme. The sessions may be delivered over a longer time frame but must be delivered as a continuous programme and in sequence.

"FRIENDS" is the only anxiety prevention programme acknowledged by the World Health Organization for its 12 years of comprehensive validation in schools and health clinics across several countries and languages. The programme meets many of the aims of the SPHE curriculum in terms of promoting physical, mental and emotional well-being in addition to providing pupils with opportunities for reflection and discussion.

What does FRIENDS stand for?

The word 'FRIENDS' is an acronym and each letter is presented individually to progressively build up the word over the course of programme. This helps pupils to remember the coping steps to follow:

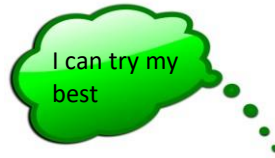
F-Feelings



R- Remember to Relax. Have quiet time.



I – Inner Helpful Thoughts



E- Explore solutions and coping step plans



N- Now reward yourself, you've done your best!



D – Don't forget to practice the skills you have learned.



S- Stay strong inside and share your skills with your support networks!

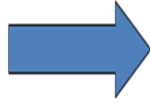


What is involved in the Programme?

The initial sessions focus on developing an awareness of our feelings and how in turn, our feelings may affect our thinking and actions. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of their "body cues" for a variety of feelings such as happy, sad, worried, anxious etc. which is supported through group activities.

The programme teaches pupils to be able to identify times when they may be worried or anxious and in turn how to positively react to these feelings. Opportunities are provided to learn about and experience different relaxation methods such as "mindfulness", "deep breathing" and a short massage routine.

A key learning point in the programme is how we can think in different ways about a given situation. The image of traffic lights helps pupils to identify how "Unhelpful" or "Red" thoughts may be challenged by "Orange" or "Thought challenger questions" to become "Helpful" or "Green" thoughts. By concentrating on thoughts that are more helpful we can cope more successfully with difficult situations. In turn, these coping skills can increase our confidence and willingness to try new things.



The latter stages of the programme focus on developing coping and problem solving skills. The coping step plan encourages us to break difficult situations down into small and manageable steps. For example the coping step plan presented below describes how the task of “Reading aloud in class” can be broken down into six progressive steps.

The Coping Step Plan

Reading aloud in class

6. **At the beginning of the class, use my relaxation strategies and think helpful thoughts! Read one paragraph aloud slowly and clearly**
5. **Practice reading one page of the book in front of two friends in the classroom at lunch**
4. **Read one page of the book in front of your best friend**
3. **Read one page of the book to your Gran**
2. **Read one page of the book on your own in front of the mirror**
1. **Read one page of the book in your head**

Pupils engage in experiential learning and get an opportunity to put their skills to the test by firstly working in groups to discuss a host of scenarios where they are required to create, think about and choose from different solutions for a given situation. They can then also apply the skills they have learned to challenges they encounter in their everyday lives and for personal goals they have set as part of the FRIENDS programme.

One of the highlights of the programme is the celebration party which takes place in session 10. This is designed to recognise the achievement of the pupils in their completion of the programme and to encourage them to incorporate positive rewards into their own lives.

Who can deliver the FRIENDS programme? Teachers, following accredited training, can deliver this programme. Advantages of teacher delivery include:

- Access to a greater number of young people;
- Non-stigmatising;
- Positive role models;
- FRIENDS’ language can infiltrate the curriculum and be applied to everyday problems.

More information of the programme can be found on www.pathwayshrc.com.au. A research report of its use in Irish schools can be found on www.nbss.ie.