

FRIENDS for Life – Learning Disabilities



FRIENDS for Life



Today's session will cover :

- What is FRIENDS for Life?
- Background and evidence
- FRIENDS – Learning Disabilities Adaptation Development Project
- FRIENDS LD & Resilience
- Doing research in field of Learning Disability



What is FRIENDS for Life?



FRIENDS for Life is an evidence based manualised programme that teaches children and young people techniques to cope with anxiety and promotes positive coping skills, resilience and well-being.

It was developed as a universal early intervention programme to help to tackle high rates of anxiety related difficulties amongst children/YP.

It is delivered in school-based groups.

It uses mainly a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) framework also incorporating attachment, mindfulness and health behaviours.



How FRIENDS for Life works



Components:

**Thoughts
(Cognitive)**



Self talk
Rewarding success

**Feelings/Body
(Physiological)**



Awareness of body cues
Relaxation & breathing

**Behaviour
(Learning)**



Problem solving
Having a go
Coping plans



How FRIENDS for Life works



It enables children to learn to:

- Identify anxiety and other difficult feelings in themselves and learn to manage them.
- Identify “anxiety increasing” thoughts and to replace them with more helpful thoughts.
- Overcome problems rather than avoid them.
- Peer learning model & experiential learning



FRIENDS for Life Mnemonic



The programme builds skills using the **FRIENDS** mnemonic:

- F.** Feelings
- R.** Remember to relax
- I.** I can do it. I can try my best.
- E.** Explore solutions and coping step plans.
- N.** Now reward yourself. You've done your best.
- D.** Do practice.
- S.** Smile, stay calm, talk to your support networks.



FRIENDS for Life – Programme/Session Plan



- Feelings: Understanding Feelings in Ourselves and others. Learning to help Others
- Introduction to Feelings
- Introduction to Body Cues and Relaxation
- Helpful (green) & Unhelpful (red) thoughts
- Changing Unhelpful Thoughts into Helpful Thoughts
- Introduction to Coping Steps Plan
- Learning from Role Models & Building Support Teams
- Using a Problem Solving Plan
- Using FRIENDS Skills to Help Ourselves and Others
- Review & Party



Background and evidence base for FRIENDS for Life



- Developed by Professor Paula Barrett (Australia) as “Coping Koala”, from a previously strong evidence based intervention (Professor Phillip Kendall, USA, “Coping Cat”!).
- Increase “reach” and build resilience by working in, and with, schools.
- International studies showing decrease in anxiety, increase in self-esteem and in social skills maintained at 1 and 6 year follow-up (Barrett 2005, Stallard 2007, Rodgers 2013).
- Increases emotional coping and resilience more significantly than generic PHSE and SEAL approaches.



Background and evidence base for FRIENDS for Life



- FRIENDS is the only programme endorsed by the World Health Organisation, as "efficacious across the entire spectrum, as a universal prevention program, as a targeted prevention program and as a treatment" for anxiety and emotional issues.
- There are now "FRIENDS" programmes for three age ranges of children and young people:
 - [Fun FRIENDS](#) for 4-6 year olds
 - FRIENDS for Life for 8-10 year olds
 - [FRIENDS for Life Youth](#) for teenagers
 - Adult Resilience for parents and teachers – "strong not tough"



Background and evidence base for FRIENDS for Life



- Some studies showing FRIENDS can be successfully used with some children and young people with SEN (Mullin 2009 with children with ASD, Thompson & Lonsdale 2009 with pupils on School Action Plan Plus).
- Evidence that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy can be adapted for people with learning disabilities (Rossiter et al 1998, Dagnan & Jahoda 2006, Andrews et al 2010, Rossiter et al 2011).



FRIENDS for Life – Learning Disabilities



This is important because:

- Children and young people with learning disabilities have higher rates of emotional and behavioural problems than their peers without learning disabilities, but research shows that they have less access to services and support (Emerson and Hatton, 2007).
- Those with severe learning disabilities may be even more at risk.



FRIENDS for Life – Learning Disabilities

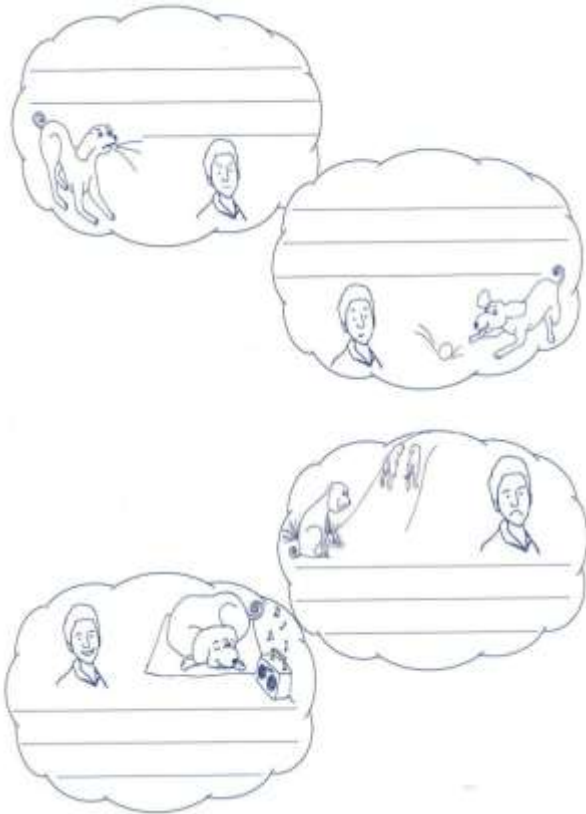


The F4L-LD project team have begun to adapt the FRIENDS for Life programme to make it accessible and appropriate for children and young people with learning disabilities.

We've developed and tried adapted activities with, and in, a school for pupils with severe learning disabilities.



The Team



- Jill Davies and Hanifa Islam (FPLD)
- Rowena Rossiter (Clinical Psychologist)
- Pupils, families and staff (Hazel Court School, Eastbourne)
- Dr Jane Woodrow (Clinical Psychologist from CAMHS LD FISS Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust)
- Professor Paul Stallard, Professor Glynis Murphy and Dr Ailsa Russell (Project Advisors)



FRIENDS for Life – Learning Disabilities: what we covered



Our adaptation consisted of:

- Simplified materials
- High visual, low verbal content
- Use of multi-media to make the sessions more meaningful
- 10 sessions of 1 hour
- 7 pupils with SLD





RESILIENCE FORUM ACTIVITY

How might you go about adapting this exercise for Children with LD?

What might you need to consider?



FRIENDS for Life – Learning Disabilities Programme Plan



- Introduction to Feelings – ourselves & others
- Introduction to Body Cues & Relaxation
- Introduction to Helpful (green) & Unhelpful (red) Thoughts
- Changing Unhelpful Thoughts into Helpful Thoughts
- Using FRIENDS Skills to Help Ourselves & Others
- Review & Party



FRIENDS for Life – Learning Disabilities: what we did



Sessions always included:

- Group activity: “Warm up” sharing, listening, discussion of homework created around an activity or game eg spinner/ quiz)
- Symbolated timetable for the session



- Activity in pairs or as group on session theme (e.g. role play, body maps, bookmarks)



- Relaxation exercise (Buzz and Monkey, breathing, pizza massage)



- Student evaluation



Tom and Pepper / Ana and Pepper characters enlarged and stuck to fly swats to use as “puppets”



Pepper for use in discussion and role plays



Red and green hats plus “thoughts” for “red and green thoughts” identification, sorting and changing



FRIENDS for Life – Learning Disabilities: what we learnt



- It is possible!
- Time – needed lots!! - Planning, de-briefing, creating resources
- Relaxation exercises were very successful
- Different people liked & didn't like different activities, e.g. relaxation
- Slower pace – We didn't finish the programme
- Some areas were conceptually advanced, e.g. coping steps plan
- Flexibility – to adapt activity whilst in the session or to re-do/repeat
- FRIENDS mnemonic wasn't meaningful for our students
- Role plays and props were helpful though could become a distraction
- Facilitators must include people who know students really well



FRIENDS for Life – Learning Disabilities: feedback from pupils



“This FRIENDS group has been lovely and beautiful.”

“I would like to do it again.”

“No, I liked everything.”



FRIENDS for Life – Learning Disabilities: Dilemmas



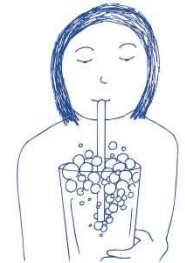
- Keeping fidelity to the model whilst making adaptations
- Balancing individual learning needs within the group – differences in learning style and ability
- How to generalise
- Involving parents
- Incorporating learning into communication passports



Resilience & FRIENDS for Life – LD:



In what ways does FRIENDS LD help children to develop resilience?



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FRIENDS for Life – Learning Disabilities: Research issues



- Less research out there
- How to meaningfully measure change?
Standardised outcome measures often not relevant/useful.
Not heterogeneous group so within group difference can be bigger than between group difference.

- Doing Inclusive research

[www.inclusiveresearch.net/http:](http://www.inclusiveresearch.net)

[Powerful trainers: - www.aldingbournetrust.co.uk](http://www.aldingbournetrust.co.uk)



Next steps



- We are preparing information to update our project page on the FPLD website, and have written guidance for others on how to adapt the programme for children with learning disabilities.

<http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/our-work/health-well-being/friends-for-life/>

- Seeking funds for a proper feasibility study and are finalising a funding application to the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) for the following pilot study.



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References



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Stallard P., Simpson N., Anderson S., Hibbert S. & Osborn C. (2007) The FRIENDS emotional health programme: initial findings from a school based project. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* **12** (1), pp. 32-37. <http://www.nbss.ie/interventions-projects/positive-health-and-wellbeing/friends-for-life>

Friends website: www.nbss.ie/interventions-projects/positive-health-and-wellbeing/friends-for-life

Friends in UK: www.interactive-connections.co.uk

