

Friendly Schools (2000-2002)

Aim

Friendly Schools was one of the first empirical trials to evaluate the efficacy of a whole-school intervention to reduce bullying among primary school students.

By promoting positive, sustainable, whole-school improvement, Friendly Schools helps school communities to build their own capacity for change. Friendly Schools aims to increase awareness, understanding and use of the key skills to build students' personal and social capability, including self-awareness and self-management and social awareness and social management to enhance pro-social, behaviour and discourage anti-social behaviour. It also focusses on whole school strategies to reduce all forms of bullying including strategies to engage with families, build a positive school climate, develop clear policies that encourage positive social behaviours including encouraging upstander behaviour and also actions the school will take in response to bullying behaviour; enhancing the schools' physical environment to encourage positive behaviour.

The central goal of Friendly Schools implementation is to unite the school community to create and maintain a friendly, positive and safe school culture and environment and positive wellbeing outcomes for students and staff.

Methods

The intervention was tested in a three-year randomised control trial, involving 1968 students and their teachers and families from 29 randomly selected Australian schools.

Four to five key staff were selected by each intervention school to form a whole-school team to lead their school's delivery of the FS program. Intervention school staff were trained and provided with resources to facilitate whole-school strategies. 18 hours of classroom activities were provided for students in Grades 4 & 5. Comparison schools undertook standard state health education curriculum.

Self-report data was collected on four occasions over three years. Student surveys and questionnaires measured frequency of being bullied, bullying others, telling if bullied and observing bullying.

Results/Findings

Results indicate that intervention students were significantly less likely to observe bullying at 12, 24 and 36 months and be bullied after 12 and 36 months, and significantly more likely to tell if bullied after 12 months than comparison students. No differences were found for self-reported perpetration of bullying.

The findings suggest whole-of-school programs that engage students in their different social contexts appear to reduce their experiences of being bullied and increase their likelihood of telling someone if they are bullied.

Who was involved?

Investigators: Donna Cross, Helen Monks, Margaret Hall, Thérèse Shaw, Yolanda Pintabona, Erin Erceg, Greg Hamilton, Clare Roberts, Stacey Water & Leanne Lester.

Publications

Cross, D., Hall, M., Erceg, E., Pintabona, Y., Hamilton, G., Roberts, C. 2003. The Friendly Schools Project: An empirically grounded school bullying prevention program. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 13(1):36-46.

Cross, D., Hall, M., Hamilton, G., Pintabona, Y., Erceg, E. 2004. Australia: The Friendly Schools Project. In Smith, P.K., Pepler, D. & Rigby, K (Eds), *Bullying in Schools: Global Perspectives on Intervention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-521-821193.

Cross, D., Monks, H., Hall, M., Shaw, T., Pintabona, Y., Erceg, E., Hamilton, G., Roberts, C., Waters, S., & Lester, L. 2011. Three-year results of the Friendly Schools whole-of-school intervention on children's bullying behaviour. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(1):105-129.