



October, 2009

Dear School Administrator:

The FRIENDS For Life Program– recognized by the World Health Organization as a “first in the world” universal school-based program for promoting resilience in children and preventing anxiety – continues to be offered to grade 4 & 5 & 7 students in British Columbia.

I am pleased to advise you that the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) – FRIENDS Program, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, school districts and independent schools, is into its sixth year of implementation of the FRIENDS For Life (FRIENDS) program in BC elementary schools. All district, independent, and First Nations schools are invited to participate.

The FRIENDS program, developed in Australia, is a classroom-based, 10-week, prevention and early intervention program demonstrated to be effective in building psychological resilience and reducing the risk of anxiety disorders in children. Anxiety has the highest prevalence rate of all mental disorders in children and youth, affecting nearly 7% or approximately 65,000 children in BC.

Schools represent ideal settings in which to detect early symptoms of anxiety and to equip children with coping skills and other tools to cope with and manage difficult situations. Of importance to educators, is that the FRIENDS program responds to many of the provincially prescribed learning outcomes for Health and Career Education K to 7. FRIENDS teaches skills such as: decision making, goal setting, creating and evaluating support networks, building and maintaining relationships, self awareness and self evaluation. Additionally, FRIENDS includes many other skill-building opportunities that are helpful to students with regards to bullying and working together in groups.

MCFD provides the certified FRIENDS trainers for the required one day training of teachers and school personnel and in addition, the provision of FRIENDS manuals and student workbooks for delivery of the program to grade 4,5, and 7 students.

As you may be aware, the FRIENDS program includes a parent component which is coordinated by the F.O.R.C.E. Society For Kids Mental Health. This training provides parents an opportunity to learn more about how anxiety affects children and about the life skills the children are being taught in the classroom, so they can effectively respond and support their children at home.

Implementation of the FRIENDS program represents an important partnership between Mental health, Education and parents. I welcome the opportunity to work together on this initiative and invite you to join our efforts to promote mental health and reduce the risk of mental disorders in children and youth.

For more information about FRIENDS in BC, please go to the Child and Youth Mental Health website at: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/friends.htm

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "K Angelius".

Kelly Angelius
Manager, FRIENDS For Life Program
Ministry of Children and Family Development