



Dear Parent/Caregiver:

I would like to provide you information about the **FRIENDS For Life** program. You may already know about the FRIENDS program for grades 4 & 5 students, and more recently for grade 7 students, - but if not, please read on to find out more!

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), in support of *The Child and Youth Mental Health Plan for British Columbia* and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, is into its sixth year of implementing the FRIENDS program to grade 4 & 5 & 7 students.

The FRIENDS program, developed in Australia, is a 10-week, classroom-based program shown to be effective in reducing the risk of anxiety disorders and building emotional resilience in children. The research indicates that up to 80% of children showing signs of anxiety no longer display those signs for up to six years after completing the program! For children who are not anxious, the FRIENDS program increases their level of self-esteem while reducing their feelings of worry and depression. This is why FRIENDS is delivered to all grades 4 & 5 & 7 students in the classroom - because all children and youth can benefit!

FRIENDS was first introduced in BC as a pilot project in seven school districts in the spring of 2004. Based on the success of this pilot, the program was launched universally later that year. FRIENDS has been well-received by teachers, parents and students and its popularity continues to grow. To date, over 95% of school districts have been involved with FRIENDS, and many independent schools and First Nations schools - our goal is to reach as many students as possible.

Teachers receive a one-day training before delivering the program in their classrooms. Teachers then guide students through a series of activities designed to teach them how to deal with difficult situations by being prepared, rewarding themselves, and seeking support. Students complete home-based activities between sessions, and at the end of the program they can keep their FRIENDS workbooks for future reference.

The FRIENDS program also fits well with many of the provincially prescribed learning outcomes for the Health and Career Education K - 7 curriculum in elementary schools, some of which include goal-setting, problem-solving, valuing diversity and friendship skills.

There is no cost to children or their families. Each participating grade 4, 5 or 7 student receives a FRIENDS Workbook, which is provided by MCFD.

Parents have an opportunity to help their children and learn more about what they are experiencing in the FRIENDS program by attending FRIENDS **parent workshops** which may be arranged by their child's school or through the First Nations Schools Association.

To find out more information about FRIENDS in BC schools, please talk to your child's teacher/school administrator. For additional information about FRIENDS, go to: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/friends.htm . To contact the FRIENDS program directly, please email me at MCF.CYMHFRIENDS@gov.bc.ca

Sincerely,



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