

A PARENTS' GUIDE TO



Zippy's Friends

Partnership for
Children



Good health

We pay a lot of attention to our children's physical health - making sure that they eat well, wrapping them up warm in winter, encouraging them to play sports and keep fit.

But do we pay enough attention to their emotional health and wellbeing - how they feel about themselves, how they get on with other children, how well they deal with difficulties and disappointments?

Emotional health is crucial to our happiness and how we get on in

life, and even very young children can learn different ways of doing things, to help them in their relationships with other people and in dealing with difficulties.

This booklet introduces a programme called *Zippy's Friends*, which has been designed specially to help five to seven year old children develop those skills at school. It tells you what your child will learn during the programme and how you can help your son or daughter to get the most out of it.



*'If we can teach young children
how to cope with difficulties,
they should be better able to
handle problems and crises in
adolescence and adult life.'*

*- Paul Rubenstein, Chair,
Partnership for Children*



Dealing with tough times



'There is a general consensus that this programme has improved how children relate to other children and teachers, as well as how they cope with problems in their daily lives.' - Evaluation Report



'I find that many parents are surprised to discover that children can be taught how to cope with difficulties, but at this age they soak things up like a sponge and evaluation has proved that the programme really does help them.'

- Caroline Egar, Programme Manager, Zippy's Friends

All of us - adults and children - experience problems and difficulties in life.

As adults, we have arguments and disagreements. We feel unhappy or insecure at work. A relationship ends in tears. A family member dies. We often find it hard to say what we really feel.

If we can find effective ways of coping with difficulties and disappointments, we feel better. And research has shown that the more solutions we can think of and use when faced with a problem, the more likely we are to cope with it successfully.

Children, too, know all about tough times. They experience all sorts of difficulties. Everyday incidents such as a quarrel in the playground, or feeling jealous of a brother

or sister. Or bigger problems - changing schools, being bullied.

But the key for children is the same as for adults. The more ways of coping they have to choose from and can use, the better their chance of being able to deal with a problem successfully.

Experience has shown that children as young as five and six can understand the idea of choosing how to handle a situation and learn new ways of coping with difficulties. If they can do this in the first years of primary school, they will acquire skills that should help them for the rest of their lives.

Research has shown that doing well academically has little effect on a child's ability to cope positively with life's frustrations and challenges, to exercise self-discipline, to make strong and lasting relationships and to live a happy, fulfilled life.

So, while academic achievements are essential, it's important to promote children's emotional wellbeing too.

That is why children benefit from Zippy's Friends - they learn skills that will help them to deal with everyday difficulties and to live more happily.

There is evidence to show that, in schools where children feel better about themselves and each other, they learn better and academic results improve.

'I have now realized that young children have just the same need to talk about their feelings and problems as grown up people.' - Teacher

What is Zippy's Friends?

Zippy's Friends is a programme for young children of all abilities. It does not focus on children with particular problems or difficulties. Instead, it promotes the emotional health of all young children. It is taught in schools and kindergartens and runs for 24 weeks, with one session per week. Your child's teacher has been specially trained to teach it.



Zippy's Friends has six modules and each module has its own story. You will be hearing a lot about a character called Zippy! He's a stick insect and his friends are a group of boys and girls. The stories show them facing issues that are familiar to young children - friendship, making and losing friends, bullying, dealing with change and loss, and making a new start. Each story is illustrated by a set of brightly coloured pictures and supported by activities such as drawing, role play and playing games. The whole programme has been designed specifically for five to seven year olds and experience has shown that children enjoy it very much.



The programme teaches children:

- How to identify and talk about their feelings
- How to say what they want to say
- How to listen attentively
- How to ask for help
- How to make and keep friends
- How to deal with loneliness and rejection
- How to say sorry
- How to cope with bullying
- How to resolve conflicts
- How to deal with change and loss, including death
- How to adapt to new situations
- How to help others

Zippy's Friends does not tell children what to do. Instead, it encourages them to think for themselves and to come up with their own solutions to problems. Children practise choosing solutions that not only help them, but also respect other people.

You can learn more about *Zippy's Friends* at www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk



A closer look

Zippy's Friends is divided into six modules of four sessions each. Each module has a different topic. We summarise them here, so that you can see what your child will be learning.

MODULE 1 FEELINGS

The children start by discussing feelings - sad, happy, angry, jealous and nervous. They practise saying how they feel in different situations and explore ways to make themselves feel better.

MODULE 2 COMMUNICATION

This module teaches children how to communicate effectively. The programme teaches children to listen to others. It teaches them how to ask for help and to say what they want to say, even in difficult situations. Quiet

children often 'open up' in these sessions and learn to express themselves more freely.

MODULE 3 MAKING AND BREAKING RELATIONSHIPS

Here the children learn about friendship - how to make and keep friends, and how to deal with loneliness and rejection. They practise how to say sorry and how to make up with a friend after a quarrel.

MODULE 4 CONFLICT RESOLUTION

This module deals with how to resolve conflicts, and

teachers comment that children quickly become much better at settling their differences. In particular, this module deals with the problem of bullying and what children can do if they or others are bullied.

MODULE 5 DEALING WITH CHANGE AND LOSS

This module looks at coping with changes, both big and small. The biggest change of all is when someone dies. Although adults often find death a very difficult subject to talk about, young children rarely do. They welcome the

chance to talk openly about a topic that has become taboo for many adults. One session is spent visiting a graveyard or cemetery and, perhaps surprisingly, this is often rated the most successful session of the whole programme.

MODULE 6 WE COPE

The final module affirms all that the children have learnt - finding different ways to cope, helping others, and adapting to new situations. The final session is a celebration, with each child receiving a crown and a certificate.

Does it work?

Zippy's Friends has been thoroughly tested and evaluated.

The programme has taken more than six years to develop and many thousands of children have already gone through it in Denmark and Lithuania. Teachers and children were interviewed and filled in questionnaires before and after, and the results were compared to those of children who did not join the programme.

The evaluators found that, compared to those not in the programme, children who took part in *Zippy's Friends* showed improvements in cooperation,

assertion, self-control and empathy and a decrease in problem behaviours.

Most important of all, children who took part in *Zippy's Friends* learnt to use more positive strategies, such as:

- Saying sorry
- Telling the truth
- Talking to a friend
- Thinking about a problem
- Trying to stay calm

Their use of unhelpful strategies - such as getting

angry, nail-biting and shouting - decreased.

The programme was equally effective with boys and girls.

A separate study in Lithuania showed that children retained their newly-learned skills one year on.

Many teachers said the programme reduced conflict in class and helped them to understand their children much better. Some even said that *Zippy's Friends* helped them with their own problems!

You can read more about the various evaluation studies at www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk

'Seventy-two percent of parents noticed changes in their children's behaviour that they

linked with participation in the programme.

Children communicated more freely, valued friends, appeared to be more thoughtful, attentive, friendly and sincere, and started understanding others.'

- Survey of Lithuanian parents

'Because of the programme I have realized how little I knew about the children. Now it seems that you can talk to children about everything.' - Teacher



‘The programme has transformed our family life. All my children now listen properly to each other. I couldn’t believe it when I found out Zippy was just a stick insect!’ - Mother

‘I know a few adults who could do with this sort of training!’ - Head Teacher

What you can do

Although *Zippy’s Friends* is taught by trained teachers, you can help to make the programme more effective for your child. Here are six suggestions.

- Many teachers organise a meeting for parents before *Zippy’s Friends* starts. Go along, find out more about the programme and ask questions.
- Keep in touch with your child’s school. Do talk to your child’s teacher if you have family news that you want them to know about.
- You may notice your child being less aggressive, more tolerant and better at solving problems. Encourage all positive changes.
- Ask for a timetable so that you know in advance when your child will be discussing particular topics. This will help you to reinforce the lessons at home.
- Be prepared for your child to start talking more - and be prepared to listen!
- Children often bring home pictures that they have drawn or the simple feedback sheets that they complete at the end of each session. Show interest and encourage your child to tell you about the day’s session.

Many thousands of children have already enjoyed and benefited from Zippy’s Friends. We hope your child will too.

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