IMPROVING COPING, EMOTIONAL LITERACY AND ACADEMIC BEHAVIORS:
THE MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION PROGRAM

“PASSPORT: SKILLS FOR LIFE”

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Zippy’s Friends & Passport: Skills for Life

www.passeportsequiperpourlavie.ca/language/en/homepage

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Mental health promotion programmes

• Meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions programmes (213 studies – 270,034 students)
  • Successful programmes were comprised of the following skills training characteristics:
    • Sequenced
    • Active
    • Focused
    • Explicit

Durlak, Dymnicki, Weissberg, and Schellinger, (2011)
Zippy’s Friends and Passport: Skills for life

Have all four recommended factors for developing social and emotional skills with elementary school children
Adolescents and Young Adults who Attempted Suicide (Spirito and others)

• Can imagine fewer ways to cope with problem situations.

• Use fewer and less helpful ways of coping when faced with problematic situations.

• **Hypothesis**: If we can increase coping skills at an early age, children will cope better throughout their lives, and better avoid severe stressful situations associated with suicide as well as seeking and accepting help when experiencing great difficulties.
Common objectives

- Mental health promotion
- Improve children’s coping skills by increasing their repertory of useful coping strategies
Common concepts and main guidelines

• Theoretical perspective:
  • Lazarus and Folkman.
    • Coping strategies:
      • Emotion-focused (change how we feel – make us feel better)
      • Behaviour-focused (actions to improve the situation)

• Situations
  • Changeable (ex.: a dispute)
  • Non modifiable (ex.: a death, changing schools, divorce)
What are coping strategies?

What we do to improve a situation or to make us feel better about a difficult circumstance.
Open a Skype account

Spend some time with other friends

Play board games with my family

Write a song about my friend

Play a video game

Plan a summer trip to my friend's house

Create a photo album

Read a book

Invite a new friend over to watch a movie with me

Write a song about my friend

Read a book
Coping strategies should... 

Improve the situation or help me feel better – or both 

and 

Not harm me nor others
Important

There are no good or bad strategies, only strategies that help a person in a specific situation or not, without harming others. Children learn to find their own solutions and assess their usefulness and not harming anyone.
Main guidelines

- The programmes are delivered in their entirety
- Positive skills are reinforced
- There are no right or wrong coping strategies - only:
  - useful and ineffective strategies
  - strategies that harm and do not harm anyone
Main guidelines

- Focus on solutions, not the person
- Children need repetition and continuity to learn successfully
  (we have been using repetition already in this presentation!)
- Children practice their skills in different settings
- Children learn from each other
- Children help each other rather than compete
- Children evaluate their own successes
Zippy’s friends

Origin, content and evaluations
Origin

Partnership for Children

«Helping children and young people throughout the world develop skills which will enhance their present and future emotional wellbeing.»
What is the Zippy’s Friends?
Zippy’s Friends

- For children 6 and 7 years old
- 24 sessions approximately 45 minutes/one per week
- Provided by specially trained teachers
- 6 illustrated stories about Zippy and his friends
- Activities: Groupe discussions, drawings, role plays, etc.
- Over 1.3 million children in 30 countries
Zippy
and his friends
Programme content
1. Feelings

- Session 1: Feeling sad – feeling happy
- Session 2: Feeling angry or annoyed
- Session 3: Feeling jealous
- Session 4: Feeling nervous
2. Communications

• Session 1: Improving communication
• Session 2: Listening
• Session 3: Who can help us?
• Session 4: Saying what you want to s
3. Making & breaking relationships

- Session 1: How to keep a friend
- Session 2: Dealing with loneliness & rejection
- Session 3: How to resolve conflicts with friends
- Session 4: How to make friends
4. Conflict resolution

- Session 1: How to recognise good solutions
- Session 2: Bullying
- Session 3: Solving problems
- Session 4: Helping others resolve conflicts
5. Dealing with change and loss

- Session 1: Change and loss are part of life
- Session 2: Coping with death
- Session 3: Visit to the graveyard
- Session 4: Learning from change and loss
6. We cope

- Session 1: Different ways to cope
- Session 2: How to help others
- Session 3: Adapting to new situations
- Session 4: Celebrating together
Zippy’s Friends evaluations


General findings
Implementation of Zippy’s Friends

- Programme ‘very much’ attained goals
- Teacher training was ‘very adequate’
- Children liked the sessions, ‘teachers thought they were very useful’
- Overall average participation per session ‘High’
General findings:

Significant Effects
(Pre-post comparisons with control groups)

Improvement in all four key social skills

- Cooperation
- Self Control
- Assertion
- Empathy
General findings: Significant Effects

- ✆ Positive coping strategies (ex.: saying sorry, telling the truth)
- ✆ Emotional literacy
- ✆ Class climate
- ✅ Negative strategies (ex.: screaming, bitting their own nails)
- ✅ Bullying
- ✆ Improved school performance
General findings:
Problem behaviors

- ↓ Externalizing
- ↓ Hyperactivity

- Both decreased in Experimental Group compared to increased in Control Group
Passport: Skills for life

Development, implementation and evaluation
• Financed by the Public Health Agency of Canada as part of a competition on « innovation strategies »:

• To develop a mental health promotion programme for older primary school children;

• that can be used in diverse sites and environments,

• with scientific evaluation of the implementation and effects.
Stages in the Development of the Programme

- **Phase 1 - pilot : 2009 – 2010**
  - Needs assessment – focus groups and consultations with stakeholders (planners, administrators, teachers, parents, children)
  - Creation of short 4 session pilot programme;
  - Implementation and evaluation of pilot programme.

- **Phase 2 - version 1 : 2011-2012 school year**
  - Creation of all activities
  - Test activities in summer camps, then revisions;
  - Implemented in schools
  - Evaluation, including comparisons with control groups (pretest & posttest).
Stages in the Development of the Programme

- **Phase 2 – version 2: 2012-2014**
  - Revisions of version 1, ajustements & validation of new activities in summer camps;
  - Implementation of version 2 in schools;
  - Evaluation, including comparaisons with control groups (pretest, posttest, 1 year follow-up).

- **Phase 2 – final version: 2014-2015**
  - Revision et ajustements of activities;
  - Linguistic corrections for international French and translation to English;
  - Printing of English and French versions of all material
Stages in the Development of the Programme

- **Dissemination begins 2015-2016**
  - Development of website for teachers, parents, children, general public, decision makers (available in French April 2016, in English July 2016);
  - Development of « motion comics » electronic version of comic strips;
  - Promotion and distribution of the programme in English and French in Canada
  - Pilot test in Brazil of programme in Portuguese
  - Presentations of evaluation results at international conferences
  - Collaborations with Partnership for Children to test programme in other countries (and languages?)
PASSPORT: SKILLS FOR LIFE

• Universal programme for all 9 to 11 year olds
• 17 sessions, approximately 55 minutes/one per week
• Conducted by specially trained teachers (1 day prior training and half day mid-programme training)
• Comics distributed to children each week, about Olya, Milo, Elly and their friends dealing with everyday challenges
• Varied activities: Group discussions, role plays, giant board game, etc.
• Parent information sheets and at-home (optional) activities that are fun and well appreciated
• All material provided to teachers – turnkey approach
• Plans for electronic version, seeking funding for programming (but “motion comics” near completion)
The Meeting

LET'S SEE WHERE THIS GOES.

I DON'T KNOW OLYA.

LET'S GO MILO.

IT'S DARK OLYA.

WE'VE NEVER GONE THIS FAR BEFORE.

DON'T WORRY.
COME ON, MILO.
I'M RIGHT BEHIND YOU.
WHERE DOES THIS GO?
WE'LL FIND OUT SOON.

WHOOOOOSH
PASSPORT: SKILLS FOR LIFE

• Intro session
  • The meeting
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- Module 1 Emotions
  - Session 1 - Strange creature: Valuing our differences and similarities
  - Session 2 - A Dinner with dragons: Understanding and expressing our emotions
  - Session 3 - The sculptors: Recognizing other people’s feelings
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• Module 2  Relationships and Helping Each Other
  • Session 1: Life in the village: Helping each other and coping skills
  • Session 2: Friendships
  • Session 3: Highs and lows: Challenges in friendships
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• Module 3  Difficult situations

• Session 1 - Things are heating up: Dealing with frustration
• Session 2 - The heat is on: Dealing with stress
• Session 3 - Quarrels in the village: Dealing with conflict
Help Thermometer
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• Module 4  Fairness, justice and what is right

  • Session 1 - Not fair: Unfair situations around me
  • Session 2 - Not funny: Dealing with bullying
  • Session 3 - An imperfect world: Dealing with unfair and unjust situations
Not Fair

I want you to meet my new best friend.

Great!

I'm glad that you made a new friend.

It's sog the giant. We're going to the leprechaun's concert tonight.

Do you want to come?

What type of music does your mom doesn't seem to like them.

She only likes that weird old fashioned rock and rap music.

We'd love to hear them. Wouldn't we?

Sure.

Why can't I go?
My brother Grund is going.

Grund is a lot older than you.

The concert finishes too late for a young giant to be out.

You are too young to go without an adult.

But Elly invited me. He's my age and his parents let him.

All my friends will be there!

I am the parent. I am the one who decides. You are not going without an adult.
WE SAY NO, AND I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANOTHER WORD ABOUT IT!

BUT...

IT'S NOT FAIR!

WHAT CAN THEY BE WORRIED ABOUT?

Yeah, you're a giant and bigger than everyone.

It's so frustrating when things seem unfair.

My parents are unfair!!
I know how you can feel that way. My parents don’t let me do a lot of things and I don’t think they’re right.

Let’s think of what we can do to help.

Sometimes we can do something to change the situation.

I’m your friend. We’ll try to help you feel better.

Maybe we can talk to your parents together and find a solution.

I was just wondering...
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• Module 5  Changes and loss
  • Session 1 - Big news: Coping skills for dealing with change
  • Session 2 - The balancing act: Dealing with loss
  • Session 3 - Entire village: Helping each other in difficult situations

• Final session
  • The coping kit - Let’s review

• Party session
  • Let’s celebrate!
Parent involvement

In order to bridge the gap between home life and school, the programme provides:

- Parent-child home activities
- A parent workshop
Two Questions

• Was the programme implemented successfully?
• Did it have any effects on the children and, if so, what were those effects?
Design

- Stratified random assignment to experimental and control groups
- Pre-test; post-test; one year follow-up
Participants

11 School Commissions

20 Schools

E: 12 / C: 8

90 CLASSES

E: 44 / C: 46

1698 Children

I: 872
T: 826
SOME RESULTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION
Instruments

Appreciation forms
- teachers (n=756)
- children (n=14,364)
- parents (n=1,078)

Observations in classes (n=89)

Discussion groups
- teachers (14 groups, 53 participants)
- children (7 groups, 61 participants)
- parents (2 groups, 8 participants)
Strengths according to teachers

Strengths of Passport: Skills For Life

Concrete, multi-sensorial activities
Making space for children to share feelings and experiences
Enjoyable and easy to use turnkey materiel
Attractive, complete, high quality materiel
Variety and relevance of topics

(Based upon: Focus Groups and Appreciation Forms)
Strengths according to the children

What children appreciate

The materiel
(Comics, game board, skills kit box)

Being able to discuss subjects like death

Learning now ways to cope with frustration & conflicts

Being able to express feelings without being judged

Activities where they moved around (e.g. role plays, the human knot)

(Based upon: Focus Groups and Appreciation Forms)
Appreciation of modules

(Based upon: Focus Groups and Appreciation Forms)
Parent appreciation

- Parent child activities...
- Amusing and enjoyable discussion
- Increased complicity between parents-child
- Learned about my child’s opinions
- Learned about my child’s coping strategies

((Based upon: Parent Appreciation Forms))
EFFETS

Researchers:
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Sarah Dufour, Ph.D. Professor, School of psycho-education, Université de Montréal
Perceived changes in children according to teachers

- Children got to know each other more and become closer
- Used programme skills (recreation, conflicts)
- Perceived changes in children
- Vocabulary (use of words to name emotions)
- Recognition of emotions and tolerance of others
- Empathy and helping others

Based upon: Focus Groups and Appreciation and Feedback Forms
What coping strategies children said they learned

- Step back and calm yourself
- Say what I feel
- Make compromises
- To ask an adult for help
- Write my feelings in a diary

(Based on: Focus Groups with Children)
How teachers felt that they changed

- Better equipped to deal with conflicts among children
- Developed a more intimate relationship with children
- Used the criteria to assess coping skills in personal life

(Based upon: Focus Groups with Teachers)
Programme Effects (significant results)  
Comparisons of Pretest – Post-test X  
Experimental vs Coontrol Groups (N= 1492)  

INCREASED RECOGNITION OF EMOTIONS  
(« EMOTIONAL AWARENESS ») in reactions to fictional problem situations
Programme Effects (significant results)
Comparisons of Pretest – Post-test X
Experimental vs Coontrol Groups (N= 1492)

• Coping Strategies:
  
  • Coping in Fictitious Situations: Increase in the number of coping strategies.
  • Draw and Write Test: Increase in the number of coping strategies used.
  Kidcope: Increase in the number of strategies and increase in reported helpfulness of strategies.
Programme Effects (significant results) Comparisons of Pretest – Post-test X Experimental vs Control Groups (N= 1492)

Social Skills Rating System:

Increases in « Positive Academic Behaviour » in both:
   Teacher Observations (SSRS Teacher)
   Student Responses (SSRS Student)
Programme Effects (significant results) Comparisons of Pretest – Post-test X Experimental vs Control Groups (N= 1492)

• No significant differences between amount of improvements in boys and girls

• Generally, improvements in impoverished school districts and more well off schools
Impact on teachers

- Teachers who conducted the programme significantly used more coping strategies involving Seeking Social Support and Positive Reappraisal after the programme; compared to Control Group teachers, who used fewer of these strategies.
Overall conclusion
Overall conclusions

• The programme is well liked by children, teachers and parents; it can be effectively conducted as planned.

• The programme works best in 4th and 5th Grades (about age 9-11)
Overall conclusions

• Research shows increases in the use of coping skills, increased recognition of feelings (emotional awareness) and improved classroom behaviours in children.

• Teachers report that the programme facilitates their management of the class and they report increases in the use of helpful coping skills in their personal lives.