

Helping Young Children to Develop Adaptive Coping Strategies

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The aim of this study was to determine whether a socio-emotional programme (Zippy's Friends) had significant short-term effects on the children who participated in it, when compared with children in a control group who did not participate in the programme. Ten kindergartens were invited to participate in the study. There were totally 139 kindergarten children (5–6.25 years old) in the experimental group. The control group consisted of 128 kindergarten children (4.5–7 years old). Results show that the Zippy's Friends Programme has significant short-term effects on helping kindergarten children to use more coping strategies to cope with everyday adversities. Teachers also found that the programme had changed their perceptions of children and improved classroom communication and has helped them to have a better understanding of children's emotional needs.

Key words: coping, stress, socio-emotional programme

Introduction

According to the World Health Organisation's report (2008), "Depression is the fourth leading contributor to the global burden of disease and the second cause of disability adjusted in life time (DALYs) in the 15–44 age groups". The report of Hong Kong's Information Services Department (2005) shows that 10% of the people in Hong Kong were having severe symptoms of depression, which include insomnia, changes in eating habits and a lack of motivation to do things. Mishara and Ystgaard (2006) argue that children need to learn to expand their repertoire of coping abilities, so that they will be less likely to develop serious problems, such as conduct disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, in childhood, adolescence and even adult life when they are confronted with stressful situations.

Research conducted by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP, 2005) shows that 28.1% of young people aged 15 to 19 who participated in the study have experienced life time suicidal ideation. Findings from CSRP show some factors were associated with increased risk of suicidal ideation, which includes (1) problems with family members, (2) school issues, (3) physical health issues, (4) coping styles, and (5) considered seeking help from professionals in the past 12 months. Common feelings experienced by suicidal adolescents include ambivalence, depression, anger, cognitive constriction, impulsivity and hopelessness. Wong and Woo (2006) studied children's stress and coping during transition from kindergarten to school. They found that about half of the parents who participated in the study reported that children's transition problems were related to school rules and the change of learning mode, about 30% of the parents reported that children had problems with peers, and the remainder of the parents reported transition problems related to bullying and the school environment.

Lau, Chan, Lau, and Hui (1997) found that depression and loneliness were the most powerful predictors of suicide among 9- to 14-year-old children in Hong Kong. They argued that educators should help children to foster social relationships with teachers and peers, and learn to accept themselves and others, and to understand their own

feelings and the feelings of others. Lau (1993) urges teachers and parents to be more sensitive to young children's feelings, and to work collaboratively to promote the emotional well-being of children. CSRP's research shows that children of different ages have to deal with different problems — such as being stressed over extra-curricular activities, illness or conflicts with peers in their daily lives; however, coping strategies and self-emotional regulation will not be necessarily be improved with age. Studies on Hong Kong children's health have largely been focused on the physical aspect (Hui & Chan, 2006; Marsh, Hau, Sung, & Yu, 2007), thus socio-emotional curriculum programmes targeting the improvement of young children's coping strategies should be developed in Hong Kong to cater for children's long-term emotional health.

Katz (1997) also argues that coping skills can protect children from potential risk and adversity. Casado (2000) notes, "Coping strategies are essential as adaptive mechanisms when one faces difficult situations that could impact one's psychological well-being and emotional balance" (p. 3). Werner (1982) states that one needs to have a sense of confidence that one's internal and external environment is predictable and that things will work as well as one can expect, in order to cope effectively with multiple life stressors. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) point out that different ways of coping may be more appropriate for different situations and different children. Lazarus and Folkman state that coping strategies are effective when they minimize the negative impact of the stressor. Therefore educators should aim to expand children's repertoires of coping strategies and their abilities to adapt their coping strategies in response to different problems in different situations.

A recent review by Mishara and Ystgaard (2006) has shown that precious socio-emotional curriculum programmes tend to cater for children with specific needs, such as disadvantaged at-risk groups of young children (Denham & Burton, 1996; Miller-Heyl, MacPhee, & Fritz, 1998) or for children with aggressive behaviour (Vaughn, Ridley, & Bullock, 1984); or to prevent specific behaviour problems such as drug and alcohol abuse (Geller, 1999). However, these programmes may not cater for children's different needs and problems in daily life, such as coping with stress in transitions to school, coping with loneliness or

conflicts with friends. Therefore, Mishara and Ystgaard (2006) argue that an effective socio-emotional curriculum programmes should aim at helping young children to develop abilities that facilitate adaptive coping behaviour that could be applied in different situations.

Weissberg and Elias's (1993) findings show that curriculum programmes based on training a single skill to solve specific problems have been found to be less effective than programmes that aim to teach integrated problem solving, social skills and emotional understanding. Thus, it is important to teach children emotional skills such as acknowledging and expressing different feelings, and social skills such as exercising self-control and dealing with conflicting situations (Mishara & Ystgaard, 2006). Programmes that have been developed to enhance preschool or first grade children's coping strategies have shown that a curriculum that focused on developing critical adaptive skills significantly reduces children's problem behaviours and increases their adaptive coping strategies (Forness, Serna, & Nielsen, 1998; Mishara & Ystgaard, 2006).

Previous studies (see for example, Kusché & Greenberg, 1994; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001) have shown a growing consensus that promoting social-emotional competencies is an effective way to reduce aggressive and disruptive behavioural problems and to enhance children's social adjustment. These arguments are supported by recent studies on the effectiveness of a socio-emotional curriculum programme (*Zippy's Friends*)¹ in helping young children to develop adaptive coping strategies (Mishara & Ystgaard, 2006; Wong & Ng, 2007). The findings of Mishara and Ystgaard show how children's coping strategies can be enhanced when they have participated in the Programme which integrates problem solving, social skills and emotional understanding. The findings show that children who have participated in the *Zippy's Friends* Programme tend to use significantly more positive coping strategies, show significant improvement in social skills and a decrease in some problem behaviours when compared to the control group. In order to promote Hong Kong children's emotional health, The Hong Kong Institute of Education in collaboration with *Partnership for Children*, introduce the *Zippy's Friends* Programme to 5- to 6-year-olds in Hong Kong. It is funded by the Hongkong Bank

Foundation for a five-year project (2004–2009), aiming at promoting young children's emotional well being. Although *Zippy's Friends* was designed primarily for the first grade children, an in-depth study of the programme (Mishara & Ystgaard) shows that the programme was successful in helping both kindergarten and the first grade primary school children to improve their coping strategies. Therefore, the pilot study of the Programme included preschool children in Hong Kong.

Zippy's Friends is a 24-week international programme designed to promote young children's emotional and social competence. It teaches children how to cope with everyday difficulties, to identify and talk about their feelings, and to explore ways of dealing with them (Partnership for Children & Hong Kong Institute of Education, 2004). This programme was developed by Befrienders International and was translated into Chinese by the Hong Kong Institute of Education. The programme is based on the conceptual framework of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). They argue that the effectiveness of coping strategies should be evaluated according to different context and situations, thus it was inappropriate to generalise that certain coping strategies were intrinsically better or worse for all children across situations.

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the implementation and short-term effects of the *Zippy's Friends* Programme conducted with 10 kindergartens in Hong Kong.

Aims

The aim of the study was to determine whether the programme had significant short-term effects on the children who had participated in it, when compared with children in a control group who had not participated in the programme.

Hypotheses

In line with the findings of Mishara and Ystgaard (2006), it was expected that children participated in *Zippy's Friends* Programme would use significantly more positive coping strategies.

Methodology

Participants

Ten kindergartens were invited to participate in the Pilot Study of *Zippy's Friends* in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Institute of Education provided a 2-day training workshop for participating teachers before the pilot study began. All kindergarten children who attended *Zippy's Friends* classes were invited to participate in this research. There were totally 139 kindergarten children (5–6.25 years old, $M = 5.49$, $SD = 0.32$) in the experimental group. The control group consisted of 128 kindergarten children (4.5–7 years old, $M = 5.50$, $SD = 0.36$), and they were all selected from the same schools as the experimental group.

Procedure and Measures

The implementation of the programme was evaluated based on measures used in Mishara and Ystgaard's studies (2006). The Schoolagers Coping Strategies Inventory (SCSI) developed by Nancy Ryan-Wenger (Naar-King, Ellis, & Frey, 2004) was used to study the effect of *Zippy's Friends* Programme on young children's coping strategies. The SCSI was developed specifically for use with very young children and had been the object of several studies of its validity and reliability (Mishara & Ystgaard). The SCSI included 26 questions concerning coping mechanisms. The teachers were asked to observe children's behaviour at school and used anecdotal notes to record children's reactions to the stress and coping strategies used. They were asked to indicate how frequently a child used specific coping strategies (e.g., talk to someone, pick on someone) when he/she felt stressed, nervous or worried and to rank the helpfulness of each coping strategy for that child. The teachers were asked to fill in the SCSI before the implementation of the programme and at the end of the school year when the experimental group had finished the *Zippy's Friends* Programme. Response ratings were made on a four-point Likert scale which ranged from 0 (Never), 1 (Once in a while), 2 (A lot) to 3 (Most of the time). Response ratings of the helpfulness of each coping strategy

was made on a four-point Likert scale which ranged from 0 (Never do it), 1 (Does not help), 2 (Helps a little) to 3 (Helps a lot). The teachers were trained to use the Likert scale by academic staff from The Hong Kong Institute of Education. Seminars on childhood stress and coping were also provided for the teachers.

In addition to the teachers' observations, indications of coping strategies were obtained from the children's interviews using the SCSI. Each child who participated in the experimental and control groups was interviewed at the beginning of the school year before the start of *Zippy's Friends* Programme and at the end of the school year when the experimental group had finished the *Zippy's Friends* Programme. Examples of stressful situation in daily life were first explained to the children then each child was asked how frequently he/she used specific coping strategies when he/she felt stressed, nervous or worried. The child was also asked to rank the helpfulness of each coping strategy.

The children's interviews were conducted by students of the Certificate in Early Childhood Education Programme at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. They were trained and supervised by academic staff of the Institute. The interviewers were unaware of which classes were participating in the programme and which were not. Moreover, they were not informed of the nature of the programme that was being evaluated, nor its specific goals. The teachers' interviews were conducted by academic staff from the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

The Lesson Reports consisted of teachers' evaluations of each lesson. The teachers were asked to describe whether or not each lesson was conducted as planned, assess how much the children enjoyed the lesson; and whether the lesson was useful for the children. The teachers were also asked to describe any unusual and/or unexpected reactions to any of the activities during the lesson and what changes they had observed in the children. The teachers also had unstructured interviews with parents to seek their views on *Zippy's Friends* Programme. Parents were invited to report any changes in children's ability to express emotions after the children had attended the 24-week programme.

The design was a mixed model design with Group (Experimental/Control) as a between-subjects factor and participants' ranking

of frequency and usefulness of specific coping strategies and the two observations (pre-test and post-test scores) as within-subject factor. The dependent variables were participants' ranking of frequency and usefulness of specific coping strategies. MANOVA would have been conducted to examine the hypothesis that children's use of coping strategies and weighted usefulness had the same distribution. However, the preliminary data analyses show that the distributions of children's ratings were significantly skewed ($*z < 1.96$) in most situations. Therefore, an analysis of variance of distributions of items across recipients could not be used because it would violate the assumptions under which an analysis of variance is reliable: "observations should be from a normally distributed population" (Field, 2000, p. 258). Therefore non-parametric tests were used for data analysis. A Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was employed to test the hypothesis that children's use of coping strategies and weighted usefulness had the same distribution before and after taking part in the *Zippy's Friends* programme.

Results

Teachers' Evaluation of Effects of the Programme on Children's Coping Strategies

When we examined which specific strategies changed significantly when comparing the Experimental group (children who joined *Zippy's Friends*) and the Control group (children who did not join *Zippy's Friends*) from pre-test to post-test, significant differences were found in the use of specific coping strategies between the two groups. It was found that the frequency of using some coping strategies had increased in Experimental Group but decreased in the Control Group from pre-test to post-test. Those coping strategies are included in Table 1.

Kindergarten teachers also reported significant increases in the ranking of both frequency and usefulness of the following coping strategies after children had attended the *Zippy's Friends* programme but no significant changes were found among the Control Group (Table 2).

Table 1: Change of Frequency of Coping Strategies among Kindergarten Children in Experimental and Control Groups from Pre-test to Post-test

Coping Strategies	Increased in Experimental	Decreased in Control
	Group	Group
"Pray"	$T = 301, p = 0.003$	$T = 225, p = 0.011$
"Say I'm sorry or tell the truth"	$T = 598.5, p < 0.001$	$T = 1001.5, p = 0.04$
"Talk to someone"	$T = 616.5, p < 0.001$	$T = 642, p = 0.01$
"Try to forget about it"	$T = 202.5, p < 0.01$	$T = 596, p = 0.03$
"Try to relax, stay calm"	$T = 515, p < 0.001$	$T = 536, p = 0.003$
"Watch TV or listen to music"	$T = 678, p < 0.001$	$T = 607, p = 0.027$

Table 2: Increased Frequencies and Usefulness of Coping Strategies among Kindergarten Children in Experimental Group from Pre-test to Post-test

Coping Strategies	Frequency	Usefulness
"Do something about it"	$T = 570, p < 0.001$	$T = 713.5, p = 0.005$
"Do work around the school"	$T = 265.5, p < 0.001$	$T = 427.5, p = 0.03$
"Draw, write or read something"	$T = 499, p < 0.001$	$T = 380, p = 0.004$
"Play a game or toy"	$T = 709, p < 0.001$	$T = 375.5, p = 0.009$
"Think about it"	$T = 654.5, p < 0.001$	$T = 399, p < 0.001$
"Walk, run or ride my bike"	$T = 820.5, p = 0.01$	$T = 638.5, p = 0.006$

The teachers observed that children in the Experimental Group showed a significant decrease in the use of some strategies like "Hug my pet or stuffed animal" ($T = 313, p = 0.036$) and "Talk to myself" ($T = 923, p = 0.037$). Teachers also reported that children in the Experimental Group found that the usefulness of some less effective coping strategies decreased over time which included "Daydream" ($T = 407.5, p < 0.001$), "Get Mad" ($T = 778.5, p = 0.007$).

In sum, according to the teachers' survey data, it was found that the *Zippy's Friends* Programme, that aimed at helping young children to

develop adaptive coping strategies, had had significant effects in helping kindergarten children to use more coping strategies to cope with everyday adversities. The teachers also reported that the children's (Experimental Groups) ranking of the usefulness of different coping strategies, particularly constructive coping strategies, increased from pre-test to post-test.

Children's Views on Effect of the Programme on Children's Coping Strategies

Overall, the results show that kindergarten children in the Experimental group (children joined *Zippy's Friends*) did not report that they had changed their coping strategies from pre-test to post-test. However, the Control group children (children who did not follow the *Zippy's Friends* Programme) reported more significant decreases in the use of specific coping strategies when compared with the Experimental Groups, which includes "Cuddle my pet or stuffed animal" ($T = 833$, $p = .04$), "Talk to myself" ($T = 981.5$, $p = .04$), "Think about it" ($T = 982$, $p = .01$) and "Watch TV or Listen to Music" ($T = 966$, $p = .01$).

The children who participated in this study generally did not feel that they had changed much in their use of coping strategies after joining the *Zippy's Friends* Programme. Mishara and Ystgaard's study (2006) found that children (Experimental and Control) from Denmark did not report significant changes of cooperation, assertion or self-control from pre-test to post-test. But the teachers in that study reported that children's self-control in the Experimental Groups had increased significantly. As suggested by Mishara and Ystgaard (p. 120), "children's self-reports are not as reliable as standardized ratings by adults". Preschoolers usually rate their ability as extremely high and often underestimate the difficulty of tasks (Harter, 2003). Children in our study tended to give themselves very high rating before and after they join *Zippy's Friends* Programme. This may explain why children did not report significant changes in coping after they had attended the *Zippy's Friends* Programme class.

Teachers' Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Programme

During Zippy's Friends lessons, the teachers teach children how to cope with everyday difficulties (such as how to make friends, resolve conflicts); to identify and talk about their feelings, and to explore ways of dealing with them (Partnership for Children & Hong Kong Institute of Education, 2004). Vocabulary related to emotions—such as being angry, jealous, sad and upset was introduced in the lessons. The most frequent suggestions of what the children have learned from the Programme are listed as follows. Generally, teachers found that children:

1. were able to resolve problems more quickly because they had the vocabulary to talk about problems.
2. learned how to make friends.
3. learned to listen to others.
4. enjoyed listening to the teachers reading the Zippy stories.
5. liked the *Zippy* lessons.
6. could share their feelings with their friends, teachers and *Zippy*—the make-believe stick insect— in the story.

According to the teachers' lesson reports (see Appendix), they found that the children enjoyed activities in *Zippy's Friends* and were willing to share their views and feelings during the lessons. The teachers celebrated with children at the last lesson; children were joyful and expressed that they wanted to continue with the programme. Findings generated from the lesson reports and informal interviews with the teachers were summarized as follows.

Understanding of Feelings

The teachers found that young children needed time to develop their understanding of different emotions. The children could suggest ways of seeking for help, but they might not distinguish the difference between feeling angry and annoyed and had problems in identifying the effectiveness of communication skills in the first two modules.

However, kindergarten children might not be able to express their feelings clearly in words (e.g., jealousy); the teachers had encouraged them to express their emotions by drawing or participating in role play. The children found it easier to use drawings to express their feelings (Figure 1). For instance, the children's drawings reflected that kindergarten children generally experienced social-relational jealousy; they focused on the child's loss of love and/or attention. By looking at the children's drawings and listening to them talk about their feelings during the lessons, teachers acquired a better understanding of the children's emotions and the causes of different feelings. The teachers also talked about different ways to cope with jealousy during the lessons.

Figure 1: Drawings of Jealousy: "Mother loved my brother and did not love me" (drawn by a 5-year-old girl, 2005)



It was found that children's ability to express their emotions and involvement in discussions began to improve during modules 3 and 4. The aims of these two modules were to improve the children's ability to make friends and to resolve conflicts. The children enjoyed making a puppet of one of their friends and this activity had successfully initiated good discussions about how to keep a friend. Children also learned more problem-solving skills and became more efficient in generating coping strategies for different situation and, at the same time, their social skills had improved. Role-plays were the most popular activities among the children. The teachers found that it was easier for the children to understand different emotions and express themselves when they were involved in the role-plays.

Active coping strategies are used in order to achieve some degree of personal control over the stressful situation and one's emotions. These coping strategies are different from efforts to adapt to or avoid stressful aspects (Clarke, 2006). The teachers noted that it is important to encourage children to use active coping strategies in their daily lives, so that they may construct effective coping strategies to solve daily problems. In Module 5, when the teachers were discussing strategies to deal with change and loss with children, they found that the children were generally very open to talking about death and bereavement during the lessons. The children understood that change and loss were part of normal everyday experiences, and that changes often had both negative and positive aspects. For instance, a six-year-old girl said,

I had two rabbits. I lost both of them. One rabbit got sick and died after eating some vegetables in the field outside my home. It was a bad change. Another rabbit ran away too. I felt both sad and happy about it. I felt sad that I could not see it again but I was pleased with the fact that she was still alive.

A five-year-old girl said she was sad that she might lose in touch with her friends in the kindergarten, but she was "excited to meet new friends and do new things in the primary school."

Effects of Zippy's Friends Programme on Teachers

The teachers shared what they had learned from the Programme during the support sessions. Below is a summary of the most frequent suggestions of what teachers have learned from the programme.

Teachers learned:

1. how to better handle everyday problems in the classroom.
2. to talk with children in different ways and learned that children can talk about feelings and problems.
3. more about emotions and to be more open about their own feelings.

Teachers also found the programme had changed their perceptions of children and improved classroom communication. In sum, the programme has helped teachers to have a better understanding of children's emotional needs.

Parents' Views on the Effects of the Programme

The teachers had unstructured interviews with parents to seek their views on the *Zippy's Friends* Programme. The parents of the children in the experimental group were asked to share their observation of their children's use of coping strategies in daily life. Parents found that their children:

1. would share their feelings and problems with them after joining the programme.
2. knew how to solve problems.
3. became more kind and considerate towards the others.
4. could use more vocabulary to express their feeling and opinions.
5. would use coping strategies to cope with daily problems.
6. became more mature and learned to control their emotions.
7. often tried to help others solve problems.

Mrs. Yeung, mother of a participating child commented, "He changed from a passive boy to an active boy. He also became more active in helping others". Another parent reported, "My son would not take the initiative to solve his problems before he had Zippy's classes. Now he will try to use different ways to solve problems." Mr To said, "I appreciate this programme very much. After joining the programme, my daughters would shake hands after they had an argument. They would use coping strategies learned during the lesson to resolve conflicts".

In sum, the results show that the programme was well received by teachers and parents. They all noticed some positive impacts of the programme on the children's social and emotional well-being. Parents and teachers agree that the programme had enhanced children's ability to acknowledge and express feelings and use different coping strategies to solve problems.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study shows that the *Zippy's Friends* Programme has some short-term effects on helping kindergarten children to use more coping strategies to cope with everyday adversities. Teachers also found that the programme changed their perceptions of children and improved classroom communication and has helped them to have a better understanding of children's emotional needs. The stories and comments teachers reported in their lesson reports support the quantitative data.

Following Cohen's guidelines for interpreting estimates of effect sizes which suggested that "a correlation coefficient of 0 means the experiment had no effect, and a value of 1 means that the experiment completely explains the variance in the data." (Field & Hole, 2003, p. 153), our results indicate a "medium" effect size for children's improvements in specific coping strategies based upon teacher observation (e.g., "Do something about it", "Do work around the school", or "think about it"). Other improvements in coping, based upon teacher observation indicate a "small" effect size (e.g., "Pray", "Say I'm sorry or tell the truth"). We found that the effect of the *Zippy's Friends*

Programme was stronger for coping strategies that were closely related to the module objectives. For instance, the Programme aimed at helping children to develop both (1) emotion-focused coping strategies which focus on decreasing the negative feelings that a person has after experiencing a stressful situation; and (2) behaviour-focused coping strategies that focus on trying to change and improve the situation. The results showed a medium effect on children's increase in using both emotional-focused coping strategies (e.g., "Try to relax, stay calm") and behaviour-focused coping strategies (e.g., "Do something about it", "Do work around the school", "Think about it"). The results based on teachers' observations also showed that children had used more of the coping strategies learned in the lessons and they found the usefulness of these strategies improved overtime (e.g., "Draw, write or read something").

This study may be criticized for using teachers who were involved in the programme to undertake observations, even though standardized instruments were used to assess the effects of the programme. Due to budget constraints, we were not able to hire totally unbiased outside observers to watch children and report on their behaviours. In order to check the reliability of teachers' observations, researchers had conducted two classroom observations for each school during the study, in order to understand the children's use of coping strategies at school. Future research needs to replicate the findings with measures that are based on independent observations of children's coping strategies, rather than observations by teachers, in order to avoid any bias due to familiarity with the children and direct participation in the programme.

The children in the Experimental Group had talked significantly more to someone when they were stressed after they had attended *Zippy's* classes, which might explain why they had a significant decrease in the use of "Talk to myself". During *Zippy's Friends* lessons, the children were encouraged to express their emotions and talk about their daily problems (such as having conflicts with friends) with peers. The teachers introduced different coping strategies to the children and discussed the helpfulness of different strategies with them, e.g., whether a strategy could help children to feel better, resolve problems and maintain good relationships with others. The teachers also emphasized

that “we should not hurt oneself and others” in the programme, which might have contributed to the children’s decrease in using some coping strategies such as “Daydream” and “Get Mad”. In contrast, the teachers found that the children’s tendency to think and do something about the problem increased after attending the Programme, e.g., “Do work around the school”, “Draw, write or read something”, “Walk, run or ride in my bike” or “Think about it”. The Children in the Experimental Group also reported that the frequency of “Eat or Drink in order to cope with negative feelings” and the ranking of the usefulness of “Run or walk away” increased significantly from pre-test to post-test. Young children generally enjoy food and physical activities; this may explain why food and exercise can release children’s stress.

The children were encouraged to express their feelings through drawings, and to suggest coping strategies after the teachers had read out a story during *Zippy’s Friends* lessons. These activities may have had a positive effect on the children. It is likely that the programme had expanded the children’s repertoire of adaptive coping strategies and had encouraged them to select coping strategies that they found useful in coping with daily problems.

Wong and Woo’s study (2006) on children’s fear, stress and coping during transition from kindergarten to school had shown that 37.2% of the parents reported that children had problems with peers during the transition period and parents found that children with friends found it easier to adapt to the new school environment. The present study has shown that children were more willing to talk about their problems with others after attending the *Zippy’s Friends* Programme. In contrast, children who did not attend the programme, tended to talk less with others about their stress as they grew older. Casado’s study (2000) on coping strategies and gender differences also found that resilient children were more socially responsive. Thus it is very important to expand, not only children’s repertoire of adaptive coping strategies but also social skills during preschool years. When children find it easy to make friends, they are more likely to receive social and emotional support from friends when they were experiencing difficulties in life.

This study shows that children do not naturally acquire coping strategies as they grow older. A regular socio-emotional programme is

needed at school in order to expand children's repertoire of coping abilities to enable them to cope with daily difficulties. I do not pretend that *Zippy's Friends* can give children all the coping strategies they need in daily life. Educators, teachers and parents should continue to work collaboratively to promote total health education among children and adolescents, which includes both the physical and emotional well-being of young children.

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Note

1. http://www.ied.edu.hk/ece/zippy_friends/index.htm
(香港教育學院「比比和朋友」計劃)

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Appendix

Summary of Teachers' Comments on *Zippy's Friends* 2004–2005

The following comments reported were based on teachers' lesson reports.

Module 1: Feeling

Session 1: Feeling sad feeling happy

- Children could share their sad feelings.
- Teachers found that it was important to use daily examples to explain sad feelings before activities.
- Children needed to take some time to get involved in the programme.

Session 2: Feeling angry or annoyed

- Children had problems in distinguishing the difference between feeling angry and troublesome. Their solutions of handling anger were similar to those suggested for solving sad feelings in session 1.
- Children were very involved in this session.
- Some children could not read the cards in activity 2; teachers helped them by reading aloud the content.

Session 3: Feeling jealous

- Some children did not understand the concept of jealousy and thought it was the same as sadness or anger. Teachers helped them by using examples relating to children's experience. Teachers found that children generally stated that they had jealous feelings towards siblings or even parents ("I felt jealous when my parents talked to each other and ignored me", said one single child).

Session 4: Feeling nervous

- Children had problems in distinguishing between nervous feelings and scared feelings.
- Children enjoyed the game and were willing to share in activity 2.

Module 2: Communication

Session 1: Improving communications

- Some children found it difficult to practice good communication during the lesson. Teachers solved this problem by demonstrating good communication skills and encouraged children to use *Zippy's Friends'* communication skills in daily life.

Session 2: Listening

- Children had problems in identifying the effectiveness of communication skills during the discussion. Teachers found that children had a better understanding of the importance of listening when they were asked to act out the situation (such as pretend that you were listening attentively or not listening).

Session 3: Who can help us?

- Teachers had to explain the content written in the situation for discussion.
- The methods of seeking for help suggested by children were similar, but teachers had successfully encouraged children to share their feelings.

Session 4: Saying what you want to say

- Role play could stimulate children's interests and encouraged them to suggest ways to solve different problems.
- Some children found it hard to understand the rules of communication. Teachers suggested that children need more practice in daily life.
- "I found it helpful if children could have the chance to practice what they learned in daily life. Once I heard a child reminded his classmates to respect others and not to say nasty things." A kindergarten teacher reported during the support session.

Module 3: Making and Breaking Relationships

Session 1: How to keep a friend

- Children liked to make puppets to represent their friends and it led to a good discussion about how to make friends and keeping relationships. Children enjoyed making the puppets, thus teachers found that there was not enough time for making puppets during the session. One teacher suggested that teachers could let children make the puppets before the *Zippy's Friends* session.

Session 2: Dealing with loneliness and rejection

- Children enjoyed the Loneliness Play, and found it meaningful. The game had encouraged children to accept others and concerned about the feelings of being rejected.

Session 3: How to resolve conflicts with friends

- Children were asked to write solutions for solving conflicts with friends on petals of a paper flower. Children liked this game and suggested different solutions for solving conflicts with friends. The Flower of Reconciliation was closely related to children's life. Teachers found this activity useful in encouraging children to suggest ways for solving problems.

Session 4: How to make friends

- Most children could think of many ways to make friends. Some of them had difficulties in expressing themselves, but found it easier to demonstrate their ideas with actions (acting out the solutions). It was suggested that teachers should use more role plays to help children to express themselves.

Module 4: Conflict resolution

Session 1: How to recognize good solutions

- The activities were useful in encouraging children to use different

vocabulary to express their feelings. They also learnt more problem-solving skills.

Session 2: Bullying

- Hong Kong children generally did not have much experience in bullying and need teachers' help in discussing the content. They could express their feelings towards bullying. Many children stated that they did not agree with bullying and had sympathy towards those who were bullied.

Session 3: Solving problems

- The domino game helped children understand how important it was to stop negative behaviour.

Session 4: Helping others resolve conflicts

- This session involved many rules for conflict resolution. Children might not be able to understand all the rules at the same time.
- Teachers suggested that children should be encouraged to use these rules to solve conflicts with their peers or siblings.

Module 5: Dealing with Change and Loss

Session 1: Change and loss are part of life

- Teachers were surprised to know that children generally experience losses or change in daily life, such as the death of a pet, loss of grandparents, loss of relatives and change of school.

Session 2: Coping with death

- Children were open to speaking about death and bereavement during the lesson.
- Activity 1 was effective in drawing children's attention. Children were willing to share their experiences about death. Some parents had already discussed ways of dealing with death with their children before class.

Session 3: Visit to a graveyard

- Children were very excited when they were visiting graveyard and their responses of death were positive. Teachers had positive responses towards the session. Children learned the importance of respecting others; they had the chance to ask different questions about death, shared their worries and expressed their feelings.

Session 4: Benefits of change and loss

- Children were very involved in the activities and role play. The session had helped children to understand that there were both dark and bright sides of change and loss.

Module 6: We Cope

Session 1: Different ways to cope

- Some of the children found it hard to think about things that were changeable or unchangeable. Teachers needed to demonstrate the ideas with daily examples.

Session 2: How to help others

- Children were very involved in the role play and suggested many ways to help others.

Session 3: Adapting to new situations

- The role-play was popular, and children liked to talk about what they were expected when they transited to primary school or promoted to Primary Two.

Session 4: Celebrating together

- Celebration was a joyful and happy event. Children said that they wanted to continue with the programme.

幫助兒童發展應對逆境的能力

黃敏

摘要

本研究旨在探討一個社交情緒教育課程（「比比和朋友」）對兒童的短期影響。研究邀請了十所幼稚園參與此計劃。實驗組包括 139 名五至六歲的兒童。控制組包括 128 名同齡兒童。結果顯示「比比和朋友」課程能有效地幫助兒童發展應對逆境的能力。參與這計劃的老師表示這計劃改變了他們對兒童的看法，改善了課堂上師生之溝通，以及幫助他們更明白兒童的情緒需要。

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