

A cluster randomised controlled trial comparing the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a school-based cognitive-behavioural therapy programme (FRIENDS) in the reduction of anxiety and improvement in mood in children aged 9/10 years

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Plain English summary

Effectiveness of FRIENDS in reduction of anxiety and improvement in mood

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Plain English summary

What was the problem?

Many children and young people suffer with anxiety. Anxiety can affect school work, family life and friendships and increases the risk of mental health problems in early adulthood. However, few children with anxiety receive any form of help.

One way to help is through prevention programmes provided in schools. Anxiety prevention programmes appear promising although few large high-quality trials have been reported and none has been undertaken in the UK.

What did we do?

In our study we investigated whether an anxiety prevention programme (FRIENDS) taught in schools by trained health professionals (such as nurses, psychologists and art therapists) and teaching staff (such as teachers, special educational needs co-ordinators and teaching assistants) was more effective than usual school lessons (personal, social and health education, PSHE).

What did we find?

Children who received the FRIENDS programme taught by health professionals achieved quicker reductions in anxiety. At 12 months, these children reported less anxiety than those taught the FRIENDS programme by teaching staff or those who had their usual school lessons. However, these benefits were not found at 24 months. Anxiety reduced in all groups regardless of the intervention received.

What does this mean?

We found little evidence to justify the widespread use of universal anxiety prevention programmes in schools.

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