

# Emotional literacy programme in special schools for children with a learning disability in England: the ZF-SEND feasibility RCT

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## Plain language summary

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# Plain language summary

## Why this research is important

Emotional literacy (the ability to understand, express and manage your own feelings and be aware of other people's emotional needs) is important for mental health. There are no programmes where research tells us that emotional literacy programmes for children in special schools 'work'.

## The programme

Zippy's Friends is an emotional literacy programme widely used in mainstream schools. Zippy's Friends for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is adapted for use in special schools.

## How we did it

Eight special schools were involved. Five used Zippy's Friends for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in at least one class over a school year. They were compared with three that used standard teaching programmes only. Teachers, parents and children completed questionnaires to measure changes in children's emotional literacy, mental health and behaviour over the school year. We also interviewed teachers, parents and children to find out about their experiences of taking part in the study and Zippy's Friends for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

This study was designed to find out:

1. How willing schools are to take part
2. If Zippy's Friends for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities can be delivered as planned
3. If the questionnaires are suitable.

## The results

Fifty-three pupils were recruited; none dropped out. Teachers returned questionnaires for 62% of children at the end of the school year. Feedback on Zippy's Friends for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities from pupils, parents/carers and teachers was very positive.

## What this means

This study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this made it more difficult, it was feasible. The results tell us that a larger-scale version of this study can be done, provided that we make changes to improve: (1) the timing of contacting schools; (2) how we collect information and (3) how we work with parents/carers. With these improvements, a larger study may be able to tell us whether Zippy's Friends for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities can improve emotional literacy in children in special schools to help them cope with problems and have better mental health.

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