



COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES
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**PROMOTING RESILIENCE (SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE)
IN YOUNG CHILDREN**

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Definition: Promotion of cooperative behaviour, initiation and maintaining of peer and adult relationships, managing of conflict, sense of mastery and self-worth, and emotional control.

Elements:

-Teach children in role-play games to detect and react to other people's feelings and to feel self-esteem and competent. Example: Seat the children in a circle, pass a soft ball around and ask each child to introduce him/herself and say what colour their own hair is, how many brothers and sisters they have, what they like doing, etc.

-Teach interaction with other children and adults: Make eye contact, smile, speak confidently, share.

-Encourage helpful green thoughts rather than unhelpful red ones: Ask each child to hold a hand puppet which has a red sad face on one side and a green happy face on the other, read out to the children green thoughts (e.g. "I can do it!") and red thoughts (e.g. "I'm not good enough"), and ask them to show if each thought in turn is green or red by displaying their hand puppet's green happy face or red sad face.

-Promote support networks of people with whom to share love and emulate their good qualities e.g. a brave and helpful older brother or sister. Example: as a group, make a collage of drawings of support people. Have each child draw themselves together on the same poster-sized paper. To show the children how to do it, the facilitator also draws him/herself onto the same collage.

-Adjust to new situations and detect and manage their own feelings and sense what other people feel. Example: Feelings role plays (children take turns spinning a wheel with 4 feelings on it: sad, angry, happy, scared. The feeling it lands on is acted out through facial expressions and body language), say what people in magazine pictures are feeling.

-Relax: Sense and react to body clues (breathing rate, muscle tension), and self-soothe by slow deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery. Example: after relaxation have children imagine their favorite place (e.g. beach, park). Ask them to imagine what they see, hear, smell, taste, and touch.

-Help the children work with parents to set realistic goals and plan small manageable steps to attain those goals, in graded exposure hierarchies to conquer fears (e.g. of the dark), and to face challenges (e.g. learn how to ride a bike).

Related Procedures: *Cognitive restructuring, problem solving, relaxation, role play, social skills training.*

Application: Teach skill elements in playful experiential learning such as the Fun FRIENDS Program for children aged 4 to 7, in groups of 6-10 children or individually, in a clinic or school. One or more parents attend to help their child maintain and generalize skills across many settings. Children in groups are also offered 3 supplementary individual sessions.

1st Use? Barrett PM (2007)

References:

1. Barrett PM (2007) *Fun Friends: teaching and training manual for group leaders*. Brisbane, Australia: Fun Friends Publishing.
2. Barrett PM (2007) *Fun Friends: Family learning adventure: Resilience building activities for 4, 5, & 6 year old children*. Brisbane, Australia: Fun Friends Publishing.
3. Pahl KM, Barrett PM (2007). Development of social-emotional competence in preschool-aged children: Introduction of the Fun FRIENDS program. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 17 (1), 81-90.
4. Heckman JJ (2000) *Invest in the very young*. Chicago, IL: Ounce of Prevention Fund. www.ounceofprevention.org/downloads/publications/Heckman.pdf

Case Illustration (Barrett & Pahl, unpublished)

Sally aged 5 showed separation anxiety since starting preschool 6 weeks earlier. Sally clung to mother (Liz) causing much distress each morning when going to school and when with peers, and was distant from her teacher despite efforts to engage Sally through activities and rewards. Liz usually remained in the class for its first 15-30 minutes until Sally calmed down. Liz enrolled Sally in a Fun FRIENDS group program run at a clinic by a psychologist in ten 1.5 hour weekly sessions. The group contained 6 children including Sally. Parents were invited to attend the last part of each session: at every session each child had at least one parent present and 6-10 parents attended. Over the 10 weeks Sally also had 3 individual sessions to enhance particular skills.

At group sessions 1-3 Sally cried and was clingy when Liz left her. The psychologist who did individual work with Sally contacted her teacher to offer new rewards to promote independent behavior (e.g. reward chart using stickers, sitting in the special helper chair as a reward for positive behavior). In the Fun FRIENDS group Liz helped Sally create a 'step plan' (exposure hierarchy) to reduce separation fears, which ceased by session 8.

Sally was distant from her peers in group sessions 1 and 2 but thereafter slowly interacted more with other children. Skill training that helped her do this included: encouragement of mixing with other children using a brave voice and looking them in the eye, recognizing and expressing her feelings (e.g. doing a role-play acting out her feelings with facial expressions and body language), discussing how to be good friends (sharing, helping, listening, smiling), relaxation, and having helpful green thoughts rather than unhelpful red ones. By session 5 she engaged as much as her peers did. By session 8, Liz and the teacher noticed Sally sharing with other children and holding hands and helping and smiling at them. By the end of 10 group and 3 individual sessions, Sally showed no separation fear and related confidently and well to other children.