What is Aussie Optimism?

Aussie Optimism is a program that provides schools and families with information and strategies for teaching children how to identify and manage their feelings, how to make and maintain friends, how to solve social problems, and how to think optimistically to promote self-esteem and bounce back from difficulties.

The Fremantle-Peel Project

In 2003, 63 schools in the Fremantle and Peel Education District began a 3-year study to provide the Aussie Optimism program as part of their regular health curriculum for Year 6 & 7 students and their families.

Who participated?

312 teachers from 63 schools were trained to teach the Aussie Optimism programs in their classrooms. In 2003, 3594 students received Aussie Optimism in 42 schools. In 2004, 4472 students received Aussie Optimism in 58 schools.

More than 2300 students and their parents completed questionnaires about social and emotional well-being in Year 6 and 7. Students were also followed up after the transition to High School, with 2156 students and 1736 parents from 135 High Schools completing a questionnaire.

Pictured are students who participated in the project, now in Year 9 at Rossmoyne SHS.

Some Early Results

A greater proportion of schools that did Aussie Optimism (43%) showed a reduction in student reported difficulties, compared with schools that did not (33%).

Parents’ Say

“I think its positive having packages like Aussie Optimism to be able to reflect on what we are doing as parents and how we can approach situations with our children in more constructive and positive ways. A way for both child and parent to stop and think about how we can deal with situations, emotions etc. in our everyday life.”

“I’m sick of filling out your forms! My son, however, is now talking about stress and apologising for hurting others’ feelings, so I think we’ll say the program is a huge success!”

“I have noticed that my daughter has dealt with some peer pressure and bullying lately without catastrophising, and the issue was resolved by her without too much intervention by me. I think the program has helped her in many areas over the last few years. Thank you.”

Mark’s Story*

“My son does not tend to talk much, but what I did notice, is his use of vocabulary when talking about upsets. He was tending to use the vocals he had learnt at Aussie Optimism, which I feel means he has taken a lot of what was taught on board. When he became particularly upset one evening and unable to sleep he asked for some relaxing music. He often gets “too hot”, which is common for people suffering stress, so with a fan and relaxing music at night he is able to cope himself. He also talked about feeling upset and having a little cry and that its ok. I’m quite proud that at age 12 my son is able to go and have a cry and return in a much better state of mind rather than to get completely worked up and unable to channel those emotions. We have emphasised that to go off and have a cry is ok. I feel the program has had positive outcomes for my son – he’s much more in touch with his ‘odd’ feelings and more empowered by being able to apply strategies to overcome it.”  *Name has been changed

Sarah’s Story*

“On the questionnaire completed in class Sarah indicated she was experiencing some problems. Sarah was interviewed to find out more about how she was feeling and her mum was called to discuss the results. Her mum told us “I have been very happy that my child was identified as having a problem that required a strategic approach through the optimism course. If anything, it made it clear for my child that what she experiences can be overcome and that it is recognised by others and not dismissed as foolish behaviour. Thank you.”  *Name has been changed

Kids’ Say

“Aussie Optimism has really boosted my confidence to get in conversations with people I don’t usually talk to. Next year in high school it will be easy to meet and make new friends.”

“I used the look for evidence module because I blame everything on my brother, but now I look for evidence before jumping to a conclusion.”

“I learnt that we can feel different things in different situations and I realised my family can feel different than me in the same situation.”

What Now

The Aussie Optimism Team is continuing to support Fremantle-Peel District schools in their on-going efforts to work collaboratively with parents to promote the social and emotional health of children. In 2005, 24 schools continued to implement Aussie Optimism with 2221 students as part of the regular health curriculum.

Thank you!

From the Aussie Optimism Team, thank you! We wish you and your family much success and happiness in your future activities together. If you would like to contact us for more information, please call Yolanda Pintabona, Research Coordinator, on 9266 3292 or y.pintabona@curtin.edu.au