

MEDIA RELEASE

Tel: (08) 9266 4364; 0417 091 467; Fax: (08) 9266 2266; E-mail: k.fricker@curtin.edu.au
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Date: Monday 19 August 2002
C59/02

Bullying Research Supports National Push for Safer Schools

The WA Centre for Health Promotion Research (WACHPR), at Curtin University of Technology, has recently completed a long-term study of its bullying intervention program – known as Friendly Schools – which has achieved a significant reduction in bullying amongst primary school children.

The study should prove timely and useful for the safe schools framework, a nation-wide initiative to increase school safety being implemented at the recent request of Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson.

Developed by Curtin's Associate Professor Donna Cross and several colleagues, the Friendly Schools program includes classroom, family and whole school activities intended to empower children, parents and teachers to reduce bullying.

It was trialled with over 2,000 primary school children, and their parents and teachers, in WA government schools.

Results showed that while the program helped all participating children, it had the greatest effects in children who were frequently bullied. These children were three times less likely to be bullied, compared to those frequently bullied children who did not receive the program.

Research has indicated that children who are bullied often suffer from a range of physical and mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, increased sleep disorders and low self-esteem.

The Friendly Schools program focuses on social disapproval of bullying by skilling children to recognise their responsibilities and to take action, especially as bystanders, in a bullying situation. It emphasises building social values, rather than only punishing children who bully.

The program also trains teachers to better recognise and intervene in bullying situations and assists school administrators in developing and implementing appropriate school policy.

“Schools now have a successful evidence-based approach – described in detailed support materials available for purchase – that they can follow to ensure children's safety and wellbeing in schools,” Professor Cross said.

“We are very pleased that our Friendly Schools program was recently recognised internationally as one of six of the most comprehensive and effective programs to reduce bullying amongst school children.”

The award-winning WACHPR is the largest non-profit research centre in Australia dedicated to the health promotion of children and their families.

Located in the Division of Health Sciences at Curtin University of Technology, WACHPR focuses on developing educational programs that address the most pressing health needs of school-age children.

For more information, contact:

Associate Professor Donna Cross

WA Centre for Health Promotion Research

School of Public Health

Curtin University of Technology

Tel: (08) 9457 5717; (08) 9266 7944

Email: d.cross@curtin.edu.au

Miss Kate Fricker

Public Relations Officer, Corporate Communications

Curtin University of Technology

Tel: (08) 9266 4364; 0417 091 467

E-mail: k.fricker@curtin.edu.au