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## Preventing Antisocial Behaviour In Early Childhood - The PALS Programme.

### Abstract

*Aim:* The aim was to develop and evaluate an early intervention program for children aged 4-6 years. The result was the Playing and Learning to Socialise (PALS) Programme, which is a social skills and problem-solving program, designed to target children at risk of later behavioural and emotional problems. Research has indicated that social competence is a protective factor for children against such later problems. PALS was developed for use in early childhood settings and is a multi-level program incorporating child, parent and teacher components.

*Methods:* The PALS Programme teaches skills such as: greeting, turn taking, sharing, empathy, dealing with fear, and managing frustration and anger. The skills are taught in groups using puppets, video modelling, role-playing, songs and practice activities. The program incorporates classroom and parent components in addition to the children's group program which enhance generalisation of the skills to other settings.

*Outcomes:* PALS has been evaluated using standardised questionnaires in comparison with a control group. It has been found to be successful in reducing problem behaviours and increasing social skills in children. The program enables the early recruitment of children before problems become entrenched (99% of parents approached gave permission for their children to participate).

*Conclusions and recommendations:* The PALS Programme is an effective mental health promotion intervention in many ways. It can be disseminated widely in schools and childcare centres. It can be beneficial to children at an early age who may otherwise not receive appropriate help. It is also easy to use, effective and time efficient.

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