

### **Dear Principal and school community,**

I am very proud to bring you the Zoo Buddies Well Being Program for your Infant Classes. This can be implemented as a program and/or as a resource. For the purposes of the handout, it will be referred to as a program. The program derived from my positive psychology approach to writing a children's picture book series that promotes peer interaction, communication and friendship skills, emotional literacy, adaptive expression and good mental health. Working through the *Zoo Buddies* program in school will foster psychological well-being and emotional understanding from an early stage of a child's development, thus providing the foundations for healthy children transitioning into healthy adults.

### **Why this program/resource will add great value to your school:**

The *Zoo Buddies* Well Being Program is unique and specifically designed to target and promote a wide range of developmental domains of early childhood. As a Clinical Psychologist, I meet with children every day with a range of mental health and developmental challenges. A common theme across children and their families is an absence or a reduction in emotional literacy, and challenges with emotional and behavioural regulation, which, as you can imagine, can lead to all sorts of mental health risks as they develop.

*Zoo Buddies*, on the face of it, tells of the wonderful interactions between animals of all shapes and sizes. Their fun and frolics abound. Little minds and imaginations get caught up in the antics as the stories unfold. What is not apparent is that there are underlying elements that address the sometimes latent problems that the readers have in their own lives.

My stories uniquely involve forward thinking and preventative qualities that all children should be exposed to from an early age to enhance social, interpersonal and emotional development. This development is achieved through the simplicity of storytelling, reflection and discussion. This unique method of targeted storytelling and process work ensures your students have the opportunity of attaining their full mental health potential from an early age. There is currently nothing of this design available within our schools, specifically created by an expert in child development. This can be used as a program initiative and/or as a resource to pick up and use at different times during the school year.

### **Please see outlined learning outcomes specifically applied to the aims of SPHE:**

#### **A. Myself –**

1. It increases and promotes self-awareness in children.
2. It improves and facilitates increased awareness of the mind and body connection for children, particularly with regard to their emotional experiences.
3. It strongly promotes emotional literacy in the younger age groups.
4. It strongly promotes and facilitates discussion of healthy and adaptive emotional experiences with peers in a safe and structured setting.



**B. Myself and others –**

5. It promotes self-awareness in the context of being a member of a family and/or friend group.
6. It promotes social interaction and emotional connectivity within their peer group.
7. It increases a child's capacity to relate to other people and their sometimes difficult and/or challenging presentations.
8. It offers and promotes an open and adaptive coping perspective on the many interpersonal and situational difficulties that our children can face with their peers and in their relationships.

**C. Myself and the wider world –**

9. It develops self-awareness for a child within their school community
10. It promotes adaptive skills to live within their families and their communities.

**Additional benefits:**

This program is suitable for all young children. It is primarily aimed at students aged 4-7 years in the infant classes. *Zoo Buddies* can be provided to children accessing the mainstream curriculum and for children with additional learning, social or relationship challenges, including diagnostic categories such as Autism, general or specific learning presentations. It can be delivered at full class level, smaller groups within class or SEN time, in pairs or individually for children who struggle to learn and regulate with their peers.

In the promotion of adaptive coping and increased peer and emotional understanding, this program can be used in conjunction with other resources to reduce internalising and externalising difficulties, helping some students on the transition to more adaptive and regulated behaviours.

Many schools are piloting the program in early 2024. I look forward to discussing the planned introduction of the *Zoo Buddies Well Being Program* into your school as an initiative or additional resource. Please see the *Zoo Buddies* handout for practical information on delivering the program.

Wishing you good mental health,  
All the very best,

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*Dr Joanne Morgan*  
*Senior Clinical Psychologist and Children's Author*



### Testimonials:

*"Zoo Buddies Penguin Place is a wonderful platform for the introduction of key early years learning in a fun and engaging way. The Zoo Buddies books provide opportunities in teaching and learning of key social skills including collaborative team-work through a lovely playful approach, ideal for young children"*

- Dr Siobhan Clifford, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and former Teacher, Catherine Macaulay School.

*"Penguin Place is a very engaging book which helps children to understand the importance of friendship, teamwork and their ever-changing emotions. It would be a great addition to any school curriculum."*

- Ms Karen Gleeson, Childcare Manager and Educator

*"This story went down a treat with my nieces! Lessons of teamwork and friendship, with colourful and engaging illustrations. Looking forward to future books in the series!"*

- Dr Stephen Quigley, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

*"Zoo Buddies is what is missing from our schools. We need to get ahead of mental health difficulties instead of always reacting. I strongly recommend this as a must have for national schools"*

- Dr Charlotte Carey, Educational and Child Psychologist, Primary Care Psychology Services.

A final word from Dr Stanley Greenspan...

*"Emotional experiences are the basis for our cognition and self-esteem...they drive the developmental processes and encourage our interaction with the world."*

- Dr Stanley Greenspan, Child Psychiatrist and Developmental Expert.