

MESSAGE IN SCHOOLS BEATS BULLIES

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Primary school Principals around Australia are being invited to participate in an exciting program new to Australia. The *Massage in Schools Program* was brought to Australia by two trainers from the UK. Three instructor courses were held during January and February 2005 in Perth, Sydney and Melbourne.

In all there were 31 attendees from several states including 2 from Singapore. Participants were from a variety of professions including teachers and massage therapists. Originating in Sweden in the late nineties the program was introduced to the UK in 2000. From small beginnings it is now a well-established innovative program used by over 1,000 schools throughout the UK and is spreading to many other countries.

The *Massage in Schools Program* is a peer massage program designed for 4-12 year olds. Massages are carried out by the children on each other while fully clothed. The program places a strong emphasis on respect and provides healthy touch in a caring, safe environment under teacher supervision. Participation is voluntary, however it doesn't take long for everyone to join in.

The program has gained impressive results overseas in reducing bullying and aggression both in and out of the classroom and settling hyperactive children. It is very hard to hit someone who has made you feel good.

There are many research studies praising the benefits of massage. For children it is no different than for adults. Infants, as well as children learn about the world through the sense of touch. We all have a basic need for touch. Ashley Montague, author of the book "Touching", states that without touch human beings would not survive. Studies have also shown that the brain of a child develops 20- 30% more if they have received massage or touch often.

The *Massage in Schools Program* is a quality educational program bringing healthy nurturing touch back into our schools and allowing our children to develop and learn in a natural way. Once implemented the routine generally takes no longer than 10 minutes to perform.

Benefits for the child:

- increased listening and attention skills
- builds communication, trust and self-esteem
- improved behaviour and learning capabilities
- learning about respectful touch
- calming in all aspects/less aggression
- unifies the group
- something they can all do
- gives security and comfort

Benefits for the teacher:

- quieter happier classes/more harmonic
- less stress/relaxed teachers
- more attentive/cooperative children
- great new teaching tool
- can be used anytime, quickly and effectively
- keeps children busy and focused

Benefits for the school:

- improved interactions between all grades
- calmer learning environment
- a practical tool to use against bullying
- something that remains the same as the child advances from class to class
- an innovative child centred activity
- empathy throughout the school
- positive PR model for the school

Benefits for society:

- more respect for each other
- a more peaceful society
- preventative health care
- decreased aggression
- more responsive to the needs of others

The child that benefits from massage will also have improved relationships with peers, parents, brothers and sisters, as well as with their teachers. There are life-long effects of massage. Calmer happier children grow into adolescents and then adults taking their calmer happier benefits with them.

With violence and aggression increasing in today's society and the fear of misinterpretation about the most innocent of interactions between childcare professionals/teachers and the children they care for it is no wonder that we are heading towards a no-touch society. A no-touch society promotes distrust, suspicion, violence and aggression.

A quality educational program like the *Massage in Schools Program* is a step towards reversing this trend. We will all reap the benefits from the positive consequences that it will bring. Further information can be obtained from the website;

www.messageinschools.com

For an instructor in your area contact Monica Moore by email cramon@tassie.net.au

Monica Moore is a qualified Remedial Massage Therapist, Certified Infant Massage Instructor, Emotional Freedom Technique and Reiki Practitioner and a Massage in Schools Instructor.

Note: At the time of submitting this article several schools have adopted this program and are already seeing favourable results from it.