

MEDIA RELEASE

Joined-up: School support for children with autism

7 September 2017: A new program to benefit children with autism launched today at the fifth Asia Pacific Autism Conference at the International Convention Centre in Sydney.

The Westmead Feelings Program, published by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), aims to enhance the emotional awareness of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and mild intellectual disability by building on their knowledge and awareness of their own and others' emotions, developing their skills in perspective taking and empathy and enhancing their capacity to regulate their own emotions; in particular, managing negative or unpleasant emotions.

Created by the Developmental Psychiatry Research Team at the Kids Research Institute at the Children's Hospital at Westmead, the Westmead Feelings Program supports children with ASD and intellectual disability in developing vital skills to interact appropriately in school and society.

According to Westmead's Emotion-based Social Skills Training Program Leader and co-creator of the Westmead Feelings Program Dr Michelle Wong, the program has been designed so that it can be coordinated and administered by teachers in schools.

"Children with ASD clearly benefit from the support of a clinical psychologist, but also from the joined-up support available when their parents and classroom teachers understand and can assist them in their 'real life' relationships at home, in the classroom and playground at school and out in the community," Dr Wong said.

"Research over 10 years has shown that the Westmead Feelings Program significantly improves emotional competence for children with both ASD and mild intellectual disability.

ACER Press Publisher Kate McGough said ACER was proud to publish the rich resources, including video clips, role-playing activities and take-home practice activities, in the Westmead Feelings Program, as well as the online professional learning that supports the program.

"This exhaustively researched, evidence-based 15-month intervention program meets a vital need in supporting children with ASD and intellectual disability between the ages of eight and 12 years," Ms McGough said.

"The Westmead Feelings Program brings together all the people who are involved in supporting children with ASD. It enables parents, teachers, school principals, clinical psychologists and other support staff to work collaboratively in using commonly understood resources and behaviour strategies in order to engage children with ASD and intellectual disability and build their emotional skills.

"While the program is designed specifically to teach emotional and social skills to children with ASD and intellectual disability, it can also be used to support other children with challenging behaviours or difficulties in dealing with emotions."

About the Children's Hospital at Westmead

The Children's Hospital at Westmead is the largest paediatric centre in NSW specialising in treating seriously ill children. As part of the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, the hospital provides specialist care for children from around Australia and across the Pacific Rim as well as community education, advocacy for improved child health and ground-breaking research into childhood illnesses, all in a positive, caring and healing environment. Kids Research Institute is the research arm of the Children's Hospital at Westmead.

About ACER

ACER is an independent, not-for-profit research organisation established in Australia as a company limited by guarantee. ACER's mission is to create and promote research-based knowledge, products and services that can be used to improve learning across the lifespan. ACER undertakes

commissioned research and development and develops and distributes a wide range of products and services. Any surplus generated through our work is invested in further research and development.

More information about the Westmead Feelings Program is available at <https://www.acer.org/westmead-feelings-program>

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