

Submission

No 95

## INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

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# Draft Submission

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St Francis De Sales Parliamentary Committee for:

## Children and Young People in NSW in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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# Children and Young People in NSW in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

## Introduction

The primary years of children between the age of 9-14 are a time when students begin to develop their academic self-concept and their feelings of competence and confidence as learners. They are beginning to develop decision-making, communication and life skills, as well as character and values. It is also a time when students develop and acquire attitudes toward school, self, peers, social groups and family. Early identification and intervention of children's academic and personal/social needs is essential in removing barriers to learning and in promoting academic achievement. The knowledge, attitudes and skills that students acquire in the areas of academic, career and personal/social development during these primary years serve as the foundation for future success.

The parliamentary committee of St Francis De Sales identifies a strong need to address difficult life experiences which lead to the development of resilience of children. St Francis De Sales understands the support and information needs of children between the ages of 9 – 14 in order to improve and increase the access to services for child victims of family issues.

The project included:

- A review of local students.
- Interviews with key stakeholders and families.
- Case studies of students experiencing difficult life situations.
- Comparison of case studies and statistical data.
- Basic support for development of other short and long-term strategies.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the participants in the **Children and Young People in NSW in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century** study for their time and effort devoted to this project.

The members of the parliamentary committee of St Francis De Sales is:

- Aden
- Conner
- Jarrod
- Michael
- Luke
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- Natalie
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## Definitions

**Resilience:** Resilience generally means the ability to recover from (or to resist being affected by) some shock, insult, or disturbance. However, it is used quite differently in different fields.

**Life experiences** Active participation in events or activities, leading to the accumulation of knowledge or skill

## Background information

This inquiry has been conducted by students in both years 5 and 6 from St Francis De Sales Catholic Primary School in Woollooware. The students comprise of 57 children (23 girls and 34 boys) and are between the ages of 9 – 12 years.

## Objective of Inquiry

The objective of the inquiry is to discover the views of children on:

- Difficult life experiences affecting them
- Student's views on counseling services and support required.

## Process of inquiry

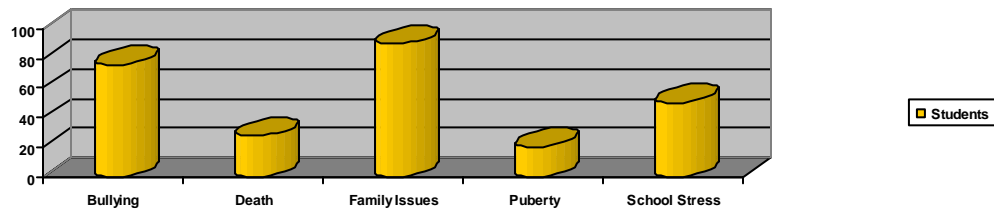
The students in years 5 and 6 completed a survey (Appendix I) and surveyed other students aged between 9-14 years outside the school to find out what young people see as difficult experiences in their life. From this research the students identified 6 common areas that were seen as being difficult experiences in their lives. The students then conducted case studies, where they formed groups based on personal life experiences, one for each of the identified areas. Within these groups, they discussed and recorded the problems that they associated with their particular difficult experience (Appendix II). Finally, the students reflected on the problems associated with 'difficult life experiences' in each case study and decided on useful suggestions regarding services and support that would assist them to overcome these issues.

<b>Family issues</b>	<b>Death</b>	<b>Puberty</b>	<b>School Stress</b>	<b>Bullying</b>
Parental divorce	Suicide	Pimples	Homework	Verbal
Lack of Parental support at home	Natural death	Pubic hair	Social rejection	Physical
Parents on Drugs and Alcohol	Death due to illness.	Sex education	Peer pressure	Emotional
Deceased family members		Hormonal rushes	Primary to High School transition	Mental
Financial stress		Cramps	Falling behind academically	

## Results

Through collation of the surveys, the students identified 5 areas that address difficult life experiences:

### Difficult Life Experiences



## Case Studies: Bullying

A young girl named Kate had been through bullying. She had started at a new school in year one & was very happy as she had a new area & everyone had liked her because she was new & had few friends. Here, she met two of her best friends & was very glad to go to school everyday. After a year, she had started to experience fights, made by the other girls. She just ignored it & didn't take much notice of this as they were only small & didn't mean much.

Once she got into year 4, one of her best friends had left the school, also experiencing bullying, & that meant the bullies went to Kate & her friend. This meant Kate experienced continuous bullying which was verbally & sometimes physically by that group of girls and tried as hard as she could to ignore the fights & bullying, but felt sad & alone all the same. Kate had problems with her parent's everyday & sometimes pretended to be sick to try & get off school, as knew what was in store for her everyday.

Kate now only had one friend, who played with other mean people, so she, worried that she would lose all her friends, had no choice but to play with them, so she was having daily fights & was feeling very sad & depressed. At this stage, she didn't know what to do, & pretended to be friends with the bullies, she worried what would happen if she said she hated them.

Finally, in year 5, she found a counseling group, run by the Catholic Diocese, which helped with her sadness. It also helped Kate by making her stronger to stand up to the bullies & helped her find her Catholic school, where she is now in year 6, ready to start High School.

If the government made more of these groups, many people like Kate would be happier & have some idea of how to stand up to the people.

## Research

Children who are bullied

Any child can get bullied just by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sometimes children who are popular, smarter or attractive can be victims of bullying but bullies may pick on children who seem easy to hurt. Children can be picked on who:

1. struggle with schoolwork
2. are not good at sport
3. lack social confidence
4. are anxious
5. are unable to hold their own because of being smaller or weaker or younger.
6. are stressed, either at home or at school

## Divorce

### Scarlet's Story

One day, Scarlet's parents started to fight and decided to get a divorce. Scarlet was scared and worried because she didn't know what to do. She thought she would never see her dad again as she was going to live with her mum. Scarlet's little sister Layla, was also scared. Layla was only 2 and Scarlet was 6, so Scarlet was determined to fix this problem and get her parents together again. She believed that this was all happening because of her. Scarlet is now 11¾ and in year 6. Her parents divorce has affected her in many ways at school, at home, in public and playing with her friends even when she plays soccer in her team.

The divorce has affected her at school in a lot of ways such as – whenever a school function is on, either only one of her parents will come because they don't want to see the other or they both won't come at all. If by any chance, both of the parents come, there is a fight or they bribe her to stay away from the other one and she feels embarrassed. Scarlet starts to get upset when she sees 'happy- go-lucky' families in public areas or at school because it makes her think of what could have been. Also, when she plays soccer, her dad is never there to see her and her mum is rarely there – she just drops her off.

When Scarlet talks to her father on the phone (practically never – he always talks to Layla though), he blames everything on her and that makes her sad.

Scarlet and Layla also have a step-mum called Claire and a half-sister called Jess. Also, her step-mother is pregnant again and due on Starlet's birthday!!

Claire doesn't like Scarlet but she loves Layla. Scarlet feels left-out when Claire gives Layla and Jess gifts, but not her. When she tries to tell her father, he ignores her.

Starlet's father is also and alcoholic an smokes. He has Bipolar Disorder and tells Scarlet to "fetch" him a beer from the back fridge. Her father can be really aggressive and has even called her the B word and slapped her across the face (and more!!)!

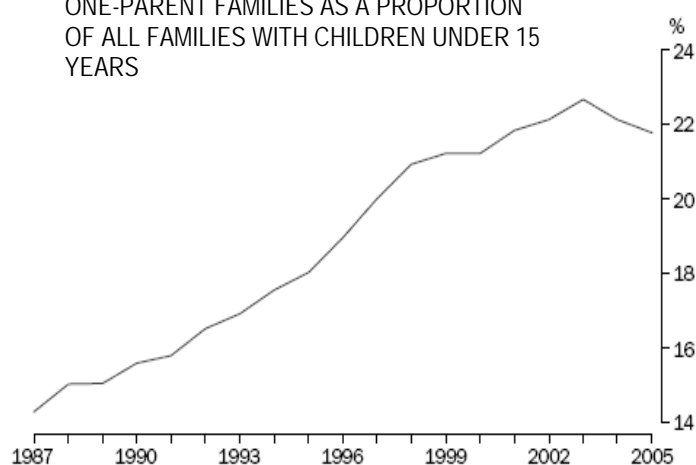
Scarlet believes that if her school had a counselor, someone to talk to, things would get better for her and her family and everybody else that has gone/going/going to go through what Scarlet has.

## Research

Parental divorce disrupts the lives of nearly one in five young Australians under the age of 20, a disruption related to long-term social and economic disadvantages. Evidence suggests that children living in sole-mother households fail to reach the educational and occupational levels of children reared in two-parent families (OECD 1991). It is unclear, however, to what extent the disadvantages are due to changes in family structure or to the reduction in resources available to the child. The effects of both these changes are likely to be complex and to become apparent only in the years following parental separation.

OECD (1990), *Lone Parent Families: the Economic Challenge of Changing Family Structures*, Organisation of Economic Co operation and Development, Paris.

ONE-PARENT FAMILIES AS A PROPORTION OF ALL FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN UNDER 15 YEARS



(a) Three year moving averages. For example, 2005 data is the average of data from 2004 to 2006.

(b) Prior to 1989, 'one-parent families' included a small number of other family types.

Source: *Labour force, Australia: Labour force and other characteristics of families – Electronic delivery June 2006* (ABS cat. no. 6224.0.55.001); *Labour force and other characteristics of families, Australia* (ABS cat. no. 6224.0) annual issues 1986 to 1993.



# Puberty

## Cleo

My friend Cleo has her period and has told me you can't do everything you want like sport and dance and I am not looking forward to it, but in the mean time would like to learn more about the changes of the human body.

Our class is starting to learn about how our bodies change but the boys find it funny when the teacher mentions the words "sex" or other parts of the body. What I and many others would agree about would be if the teachers could talk some sense into them or even if the primary schools if they had a school counselor so I know when it could happen.

## Macy's Story

One day, Macy, went to the toilet. She was in there for a while so the teacher sent Lorie (Macy's best friend) to go see if she was o.k. So Lorie went to see if Macy was o.k. When she got to the toilets she called out "Macy are you o.k.?" she heard a quiet reply that said "yeah I'm fine" so then Macy came out of the cubicle and said, "I just need to talk to the teacher" When Macy came back to the classroom she asked if she could see the teacher (Miss Valentine). "Miss Valentine I have my period can I please go home?". Miss Valentine said "sure". So she went home. Macy was 11 and this scared her because she hadn't been told much about it. This affected Macy because she'd take longer in the toilet and it would be embarrassing.

# Research

The changes associated with puberty are stressful for most young adolescents. Pubertal development is associated with changing expectations of parents who demand more maturity of their children (Hill & Holmbeck, 1987; Hill & Lynch, 1983; Windle et al, 1986), peers who press for conformity to group norms (Tobin-Richards, Boxer, & Peterson, 1983), and teachers who are less enthusiastic teaching them (Dornbusch, Gross, Duncan, & Ritter, 1987).

It has been suggested that pubertal development, when accompanied by school environments which do not meet the psycho-educational needs of young adolescents, contributes to a decline in school achievement (Peterson, 1987). The importance of school attitudes may account for the inconsistent research findings regarding the importance of pubertal development in late elementary school children.

Don't assume your kids are getting the facts they need--or as early as they need them--from school hygiene or sex education classes. Some girls start menstruating as early as age nine. Boys tend to enter puberty a little later.

**School Achievement of Canadian Boys and Girls in Early Adolescence: Links with Personal Attitudes and Parental and Teacher Support for School - October 1998**

# Death

## James

Once there was a boy called James who was 8, had brown hair and brown eyes. James had a grandparent who that had died before he was born. Every time, he accidentally ran into someone or hurt someone he would blame himself for the accident and while he was blaming himself, he thought of his grandpa so he cried even harder because he blamed himself for his grandfather's death. Everyday he couldn't concentrate at school because he would punish himself for his grandpa's death. He punished himself because James thought that if his grandfather didn't die that he wouldn't be born and that so he could be born, his grandfather had to die. At school his grades were starting to go lower and lower. The more times his grades got lower the more times he would punish himself.

At the age of 9 James thought he would try to pull himself together, so when he did something wrong he would not punish himself but he tried to learn from his mistakes by paying more attention to the teacher and listening to what she/he has to say so it will be easier for James to learn from his mistakes and do the right thing next time. As the year went on he started to control his emotions and if he did something wrong, instead of blaming himself and crying he would say sorry and help them up or try to fix what he did wrong. When James turned 10 he had never blamed himself for his grandpa's death ever again and he started to forget that he ever punished himself. He realized that he punished himself because he never knew what he looked like or what his name was, so he asked his parents and when they had finished talking to James he never punished or blamed himself for something that he didn't do on purpose ever again.

# Research

Studies have shown that when children experience the death of a close relative, such as a brother, sister, or parent, they often feel guilty. While most of us experience some guilt when we lose a loved one, young children in particular have difficulty understanding cause-and-effect relationships. They think that in some way they caused the death; maybe their angry thoughts caused the person to die. Or they may view the death as a punishment. "Mummy died and left me because I was bad." Children may be helped to cope with guilt by reassurance that they have always been loved and still are. It also may help to explain the circumstances of the death. The notion that death is a form of punishment should never be reinforced.

Some children turn their anger inwards and become depressed, withdrawn, or develop physical symptoms. If this behaviour persists over several months, professional help may be needed.

**Wolf, Anna. W.M. *Helping Your Child to Understand Death*. New York: Child Study Press, 1973.**  
Compiled from Keynote Addresses by J.W. Worden PhD at 1991 ADEC Annual Meeting.

## Review and Analysis

Through reflection upon the problems associated with each of these areas in the case studies, the students were able to identify three main aspects that would assist young people grow to be more resilient in these situations.

<b>Knowledge</b>	education to create understanding about what they and others are going through
<b>Support</b>	to feel that there is help available and that they are not alone.
<b>Sense of Self</b>	for each child to be confident with who they are, have a positive attitude towards life and have the ability to set goals and follow an action plan.

## Draft policy and Future Recommendations

The plan sets out strategies that aim to achieve resilience for children currently suffering any one of the 5 difficult experiences mentioned.

### Recommendation 1:

The first recommendation is to have various motivational speakers attend schools and speak from personal experience on the areas we have highlighted as common 'difficult life experiences' for this age group. This would allow students to achieve the knowledge, support and sense of self, in turn building resilience. Motivational speakers create understanding amongst students and encourage children to develop positive character traits while motivating them to set high standards for themselves. Motivational speakers provide support by allowing others to acknowledge that they are not alone and a sense of self by inspiring people to take action.

### Recommendation 2:

The second recommendation the committee has identified is the introduction and utilization of a primary school counselor as a means to facilitate the knowledge and support student's need to achieve resilience. Through a comprehensive developmental school counseling program, counselors will work as a team with the school staff, parents and the community to create a caring climate and atmosphere. By providing education, prevention, early identification and intervention, school counselors can help all children achieve resilience.

The job description of the primary school counselor must include:

#### Academic support, including organizational, study and test-taking skills

1. Goal setting and decision-making
2. Career awareness, exploration and planning
3. Education on understanding self and others  
Peer relationships, coping strategies and effective social skills
4. Communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution
5. Substance abuse education
6. Multicultural/diversity awareness

## **Individual Student Planning**

1. Academic planning
2. Goal setting/decision- making
3. Education on understanding of self, including strengths and weaknesses
4. Transition plans

## **Responsive Services**

Individual and small-group counseling, individual/family/school crisis intervention and conflict resolution

## **System Support**

Professional development, consultation collaboration and teaming program management and operation

## **Primary School Counselors will collaborate with:**

### **Parents**

Parent education

Communication/networking

Academic planning

College/career awareness programs

One-on-one parent conferencing

Interpretation of assessment results

### **Teachers**

Classroom guidance activities

Academic support, including learning style assessment and education to help students succeed academically

Classroom speakers

At-risk student identification and implementation of interventions to enhance success

### **Administrators**

School climate

Behavioral management plans

School-wide needs assessments

Student data and results

Student assistance team building

### **Students**

Peer education

Peer support

Academic support

# Counsellors

A counsellor is someone who gives advice, support or guidance to students with a particular problem or issue. An example of students who use these facilities may be experiencing problems with peer pressure, bullying and school or homework. Counsellors are available to these children in their primary years but the students have no access to these facilities without your support in paying the fees.

There is an average of 347, 900 students in N.S.W primary schools (as stated in the Australian bureau of statistics, 2007, for 5 ages 9 to 14). If we have one counsellor for every one thousand students, we would need about three hundred and fifty counsellors throughout N.S.W schools.

School counseling is much cheaper than private counselling:

The average cost for school counselling is \$60.30 per hour (this is based on an income of \$60, 000 per year). The cost of private counselling depends on how much your parents earn per year for example, if your parents earn \$50,000 per year it would cost \$100 an hour and if your parents earn \$75,000 per year it would cost you \$125 per hour.

A counsellor who can be hired will discuss problems with an average number of 10-15 pupils a day. Counsellors are hired on an average of 200 students for one day some examples are for 600 students a counsellor would only have to work three days a week. Although if a school has fewer students the counsellor should be employed for fewer days and therefore they would save money because they are only working the appropriate days and not wasting money on hiring more staff than necessary.

Another reason why we should have counsellors at school is so that the students will get to know them well and will have confidence when discussing problems and also have deeper conversations. This would not happen with a counsellor outside of school whom a parent may be hiring because the child may not have confidence talking to this person.

If a school hires a counsellor for the appropriate session times, the child will have had enough time to share his/her feelings. This could be a solid meeting for a total duration of 20 minutes time.

# Appendix I

## Puberty

What are the problems that you experienced with this situation?

- Not knowing what's going to happen
- Not knowing what to do to handle the situation
- Looking different and feeling embarrassed
- Worried that people will laugh at me
- I will feel different
- Not knowing who to turn to for help
- How do I deal with the changes?

## Dealing with Death

What are the problems that you experienced with this situation?

- Watching others suffer
- It is difficult trying to leave it behind you – letting go
- Not having control over the situation
- Trying to keep life going normally
- Not being able to control feelings or actions
- Not Knowing enough about the illness or the circumstances
- Feeling alone
- Other people not understanding
- Dealing with people around you suffering
- Not knowing who to turn to for help

## Divorce

What are the problems that you experienced with this situation?

- Not knowing what's going to happen
- Not being able to help
- Not knowing who to turn to for help
- How do I deal with the changes?
- Watching loved ones suffer
- Not knowing enough about the circumstances
- Feeling alone
- Other people not understanding
- Causes interruptions to routines in my life
- Dealing with arguments between parents
- Family not being together
- Court situations

## **Stress/Anxiety about High School and Homework**

What are the problems that you experienced with this situation?

- How do I deal with the changes?
- Feeling embarrassed
- Not knowing what to do to handle the situation
- Feeling stressed and not being able to handle it
- Finding the work to hard
- Not knowing who to go to for help
- Managing a balance of school, social and family life.

## **Peer Pressure**

What are the problems that you experienced with this situation?

- Feeling embarrassed
- Not knowing what to do to handle the situation
- Feeling stressed and not being able to handle it
- Not knowing who to go to for help
- Feeling alone
- Other people not understanding
- Not having control over the situation
- Feeling unaccepted
- Not being confident enough to follow through on the right decision

## **Being Bullied**

- Feeling like you don't belong/rejected
- Not being treated with respect
- Feeling helpless
- Not knowing enough about being bullied
- Feeling embarrassed
- Not knowing what to do to handle the situation
- Feeling stressed and not being able to handle it
- Not knowing who to go to for help
- Feeling alone
- Other people not understanding
- Not having control over the situation
- Feeling unaccepted

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