

# Ohio Registry of Effective Practices

## I CAN DO

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**Schools:** Crim Elementary, Kenwood Elementary, Milton Elementary, Ridge Elementary

**School District:** Bowling Green in Wood County

**Partnering Agencies:** Bowling Green State University

**Contact Person and Contact Information:**

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**Available for Program Consultation:** Yes

**Available for Presentations/Workshops:** Yes

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## General Program Overview:

The I CAN DO program is a 13-session universal prevention program designed to teach children general coping skills. The program has been implemented in the Bowling Green City School District for 15 years. During the 2007-2008 school year, the I CAN DO program is being implemented in seven 4th grade classrooms in four different elementary schools. I CAN DO targets fourth graders because this is an age at which many children have or will soon experience difficult life stressors. The program is based on a resilience model, with the primary goal of increasing protective factors in order to decrease vulnerability to stress. I CAN DO teaches children basic problem-solving skills as well as how to identify and access their own social support networks. Children learn to practice these skills in relation to five stressful life events that occur for a significant number of children: 1) Divorce, 2) Loss of a loved one, 3) Moving, 4) Self-care (e.g., spending more unsupervised time at home alone), and 5) Feeling different (e.g., ethnically, socially). Children learn coping strategies (e.g., seeking support, using a 6-step problem-solving process) that they can use if they were exposed to each stressor and how to be helpful to peers experiencing these stressors.

The program uses a wide range of activities to teach these skills. Some lessons are taught through books and movies while others are taught in a lecture format. These lessons are then reinforced using educational games like ICAN DO Bingo and Jeopardy. The program also utilizes role plays, which allow the children to brainstorm and then act out different ways to solve different problems. No matter what the lesson, active participation and discussion are a major part of getting the children involved and excited about learning how to solve problems.

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## Evidence of Effectiveness:

The program has an ongoing evaluation component based on a pre- and post-test, delayed intervention group design. One publication showing the effectiveness of the program was published during its early years of implementation (Dubow et al. (1993). Teaching children to cope with stressful experiences: Initial implementation and evaluation of a primary prevention program. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 22, 428-440) and later evaluation results were presented at a professional conference (Klein et al. (2000, November). Children's coping skills: An evaluation of a school-based primary prevention program. Presented at the 34th annual meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, New Orleans).

Children participating in the I CAN DO program complete a pre-test before the first session and a post-test after the last session. These pre- and post-tests consist of two measures: 1) The Self Efficacy Measure, which is a 25-item measure that children use to rate their perceived level of enacting positive coping responses to a given stressor on a 4-point scale ranging from very hard (1) to very easy (4); and 2) The Problem Solving Measure, which includes six specific stressor-related vignettes that ask children to list everything they might do or say in a given situation. Raters judge the effectiveness of the children's solutions on a 5-point scale, with effectiveness scores for each vignette being summed.

In the 1993 publication that evaluated the initial implementation of the I CAN DO program, information was reported for nearly 100 children from four 4th grade classrooms that were assigned to either an immediate or delayed intervention group. Program effects were found on improvement in children's ability to generate a repertoire of effective solutions to the stressful situations as well as in their self-efficacy to implement effective solutions. Additionally, these effects were found to be generally maintained or strengthened at a 5-month follow-up. No effects were found on children's knowledge of facts about the specific stressors or the size of children's support networks.

The 2000 presentation provided information regarding the evaluation of an updated revision of the I CAN DO program. Five 4th grade classrooms received the program either during the fall (immediate intervention group) or during the spring (delayed-intervention group). Program effects were again found for children's self-efficacy to implement effective solutions to the stressful situations.

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## Capacity and Resources:

For each classroom in which the I CAN DO program is presented, a team of two graduate students are designated as program leaders. Although the program could be implemented by others such as guidance counselors or school psychologists, leaders having advanced skills working clinically with children are preferred. Training for the program is currently provided as part of a psychology graduate course at Bowling Green State University. In this course, graduate students are trained regarding the theoretical basis, development, and implementation of the I CAN DO curriculum. Weekly group supervision is also provided by Dr. Eric Dubow during the implementation of the program.

Each of the 13 sessions is outlined step-by-step in the I CAN DO manual, which also outlines the materials needed for each session. Materials include: 3 videos, 1 book, 2 posters, 3 handmade

reusable game boards, copies of worksheets from the manual, and reinforcers such as candy or stickers. Additional resources include approximately 2 hours a week of staff time (e.g., 1 hour for program implementation in the classroom and 1 hour for planning and supervision). All of the materials outlined in the manual can be recreated by a local program implementer. Books and films used in the program can be ordered using references listed in the manual; alternatively, books or films local staff might have available which cover the same content may be substituted. The curriculum is also flexible enough to be modified across cultural contexts (e.g., substituting books or films that are culturally appropriate), classroom climates (e.g., competitive or cooperative), as well as across implementation settings (e.g., typical classroom setting, small groups in community mental health settings).

Although not an evaluated aspect of the program, anecdotal reports from teachers suggest that concepts from the I CAN DO program are often integrated into their classroom environments and are particularly utilized when issues arise in their classrooms. Teachers, most of whom have had the program presented in their classrooms for several years, are present in the classroom while the program is implemented and thus can directly reinforce program concepts. Additionally, posters from I CAN DO remain in classrooms throughout the program to serve as reminders of the skills that the children are learning. Parents are also encouraged to reinforce the skills that their children are learning through letters that are sent home regularly during the program that describe methods for coping that educators and mental health professionals have found to be helpful.

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## Family Partnerships:

I CAN DO currently communicates with the parents of child participants primarily through letters. Prior to the program being implemented in their child's classroom, consent forms and letters are sent home to parents describing the I CAN DO program. Signed parental consent is required for participation in the program. For each of the five specific stressors, additional letters are sent home before each stressor is presented in class. These letters describe how the curriculum presents the stressor to the children and provide parents with basic tips for addressing these stressors at home. If the parent would like additional information, a resource list is also provided for each stressor. Teachers also have included information about I CAN DO in parent newsletters and emails. Finally, parents are always encouraged to call Dr. Eric Dubow with any questions or concerns that they might have.

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## Community Partnerships:

The Psychology Department at Bowling Green State University first implemented this program and continues to be the sole provider of I CAN DO to the Bowling Green City School district. The researchers include a professor and a rotating team of graduate students in the Ph.D. program in psychology. Both clinical and developmental psychology graduate students have participated in the implementation and evaluation of the program. BGSU has built a strong relationship with the Bowling Green schools over the past 15 years and works diligently to maintain this relationship, especially with the principals and teachers of the four elementary schools in which I CAN DO is implemented. As identified by school personnel, the benefits of this relationship include providing students with

opportunities to build important coping and social skills that may not be provided by the school due to academic demands. The benefits to the university include graduate students having opportunities to provide a community-based intervention and to gain experience in developing relationships within school systems.

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## Sustainability Plan:

The I CAN DO program is currently implemented each year in the fall and spring. The program serves as a training venue for graduate students in clinical psychology and provides practical experience in the area of primary prevention of childhood mental health problems. The graduate students receive graduate credit in an advanced clinical interventions course. During this course, students learn the I CAN DO curriculum, receive supervision in its implementation, and read seminal and current articles on school-based prevention. The program is thus integrated into the clinical psychology curriculum as a service and training program. This model has been effective in sustaining the program, as there is no cost involved for the school system and it also provides valuable experiences for graduate students. Babeck Elementary, in the Edgewood School District, has 481 students who are predominantly Caucasian, with approximately 1/3 classified as economically disadvantaged.

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