



Helping kids with anxiety

Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent mental health conditions affecting children and adolescents globally. These disorders can appear as early as preschool age and often have significant negative impacts on a young person’s daily life. NHMRC-funded researchers at Macquarie University and the University of Queensland played key roles in demonstrating the importance of early anxiety intervention. Their work has led to the development of highly effective treatment methods that are now in use internationally.



Origin

Anxiety is a part of every person’s experience, however when it significantly interferes with daily life – causing excessive worry and avoidance of places, people and events – then this may indicate the presence of an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety is now known to be the most common form of mental health condition faced by young people. However, until the mid-1980s, the idea that children and adolescents might experience anxiety was barely discussed within the academic literature.



Investment

In 1989, University of Queensland clinical psychologist Ron Rapee began a research collaboration with colleague Mark Dadds to investigate child anxiety. Their 1991 review of the literature revealed that the nature, development and treatment of childhood anxiety disorders was one of the most neglected areas of research in psychopathology.

An ongoing research program in this area - led by Rapee, Dadds, Jennie Hudson, Jordana Bayer and Heidi Lyneham - was supported by a series of NHMRC grants including Targeted Calls for Research (TCRs).



Research

Rapee began developing treatments for childhood anxiety using cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)-based approaches. Prior to 1990, very little research had been published connecting CBT and children.

Over time, the team adapted and modified their initial ideas such that, by 1995, they were building an entirely new program, supported by a succession of research studies.

By 2000, and after Rapee had moved to Macquarie University, it had become the Cool Kids program.



Translation

Formal accreditation for Cool Kids training was introduced in 2022. By 2025, there were over 250 accredited therapists in Australia. Accreditation is now extended to Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Hong Kong, and Italy. Online delivery provides treatment across Australia and is also being used in USA, Denmark and Norway.

Cool Kids’ manualised approach, training, and accreditation directly influence the ways in which therapists deliver treatment globally. In mid-2025 there were over 3,000 therapists trained and accredited in Cool Kids around the world.

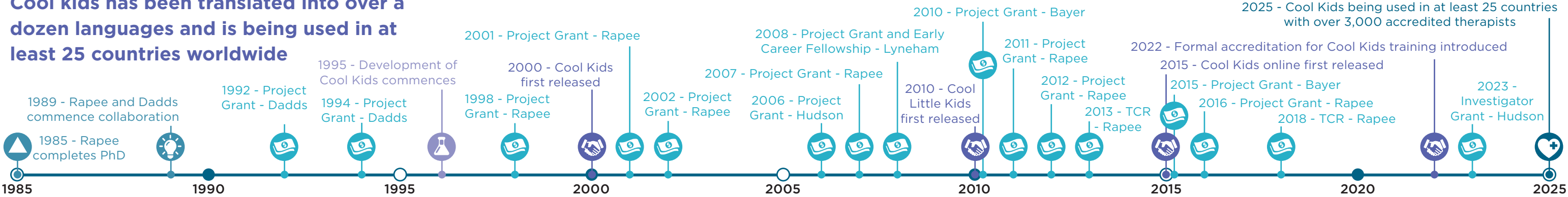


Impact

Since its inception, Cool Kids has become one of the most widely used and extensively researched anxiety treatment programs for young people in the world.

Globally, Cool Kids has changed the way that youth anxiety treatments are delivered. It is now being used in schools and clinics to help many thousands of young people worldwide. It has been translated into over a dozen languages and is being used in at least 25 countries. The program’s estimated return on investment is \$2.40 for every dollar invested.

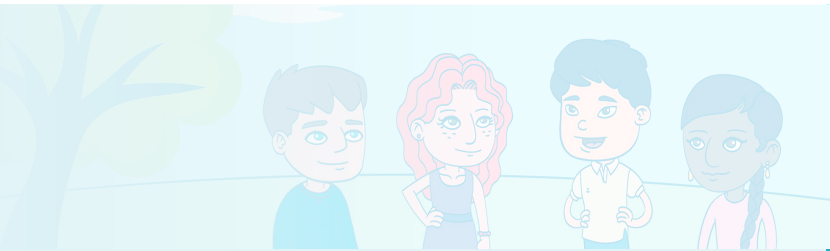
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Researchers

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