

A photograph of two young children running through shallow water. The child in the foreground is wearing a bright blue rain jacket and dark pants, with their back to the camera. The child in the background is wearing a dark blue rain jacket and dark pants, also with their back to the camera. They are holding hands. The water is splashing around them, and the background is a blurred green area, possibly a park or schoolyard.

# SUMMARY OF “FREE OF BULLYING AND CHILDREN’S SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS”

RESULTS OF THE 2017 IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME

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**RAMBOLL**

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# BACKGROUND

Free of Bullying is a preventive anti-bullying programme that has been developed by The Mary Foundation and Save the Children Denmark for children from 0 to 8 years of age, childcare professionals and parents. The programme, which has existed since 2007, consists of teaching materials that make it easy to proactively strengthen the community spirit in children's groups and prevent bullying.

The materials are presented in a suitcase, of which there are three versions: one for babies and toddlers in childcare facilities, one for preschools, and one for primary schools and after school clubs. The tools include a "Buddy Bear", conversation boards, a music/rhythmics programme and massage activities – all of which are designed to entrench the values into the children's group through dialogue and play.

Free of Bullying is based on the new perspective on bullying that regards it as a social, cultural and relational phenomenon, and it is based on the values of tolerance, respect, care and courage.

## ABOUT FREE OF BULLYING

Free of Bullying consists of practical teaching materials that make it easy for teachers to proactively strengthen the community spirit in children's groups and prevent bullying among children from 0 to 8 years of age. The aim is to prevent bullying by, among other things:

- Creating a lasting inclusive culture among children and adults.
- Developing positive relationships among children, characterised by tolerance and respect for one another.
- Developing children's ability to be caring towards each other and give them the courage to stand up for themselves and for classmates who may find it difficult to defend themselves.
- Making childcare professionals and parents aware of the impact adults have on children's relationships, and strengthening the collaboration between childcare professionals, parents and children.

The programme is based on the underlying philosophy that a strong sense of community spirit and positive relationships among children prevent exclusion and bullying, and on the principle that bullying is always the adults' responsibility. The adults who are with the children on a daily basis are the ones who have the power to prevent bullying. Free of Bullying is based on the values of tolerance, respect, care and courage.

## THE EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS:

- Whether incorporating Free of Bullying into the normal daily routine of an educational facility in a focused and structured way strengthens preschool children's socio-emotional skills.
- Whether the intensity level of the programme impacts the results of the work with the anti-bullying programme.

# THE STUDY BEHIND THE RESULTS

The evaluation is based on three municipalities' work with the Free of Bullying programme between October 2016 and March 2017.

- Odense, Thisted and Viborg municipalities participated.
- The municipalities recruited a total of 16 preschools for the project. Nine of the preschools were included in the treatment group, while the remaining seven made up the control group.
- In total, 649 children participated in the project.

## MEASURING CHILDREN'S SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

The children's social-emotional skills were studied using the measurement tool SEAM (*Social-Emotional Assessment/Evaluation Measure*), which uncovers children's social behaviour and emotional well-being. SEAM is listed on the Danish National Board of Social Services' comprehensive list of validated instruments that are particularly suitable for evaluating the well-being of young children.

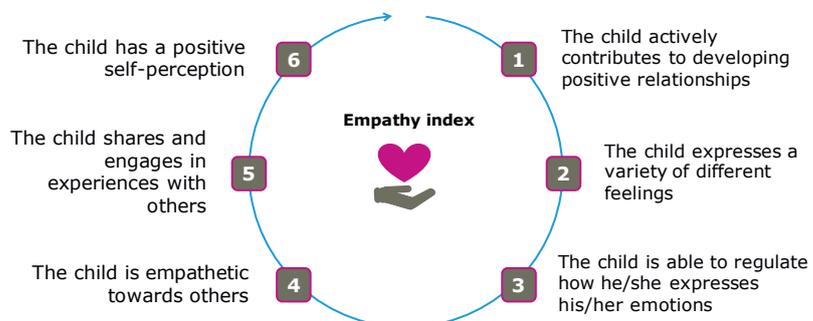
The questionnaire consists of between 35 and 41 questions or statements, all of which are thoroughly explained and motivated by examples of children's behaviour. SEAM is intended to be completed by a teacher who knows the particular child well. The questions in SEAM can be divided into 10 subscales that reflect the various aspects of the child's behaviour. These subscales can subsequently be incorporated into to indices: *Empathy and Self-regulation and teamwork*.

**Empathy** describes the development of the ability to distinguish between oneself and other individuals and thus the ability to communicate one's own feelings, decode others' feelings and understand others' feelings.

**Self-regulation & teamwork** describes the child's interest in exploring the world around him/her, as well as the child's ability to regulate and adapt his/her behaviour to his/her surroundings. The child's interaction with his/her surroundings is thereby stimulated and refined. This leads to the development of adaptive and interpersonal skills that promote the interaction between the child and his/her surroundings on a daily basis.

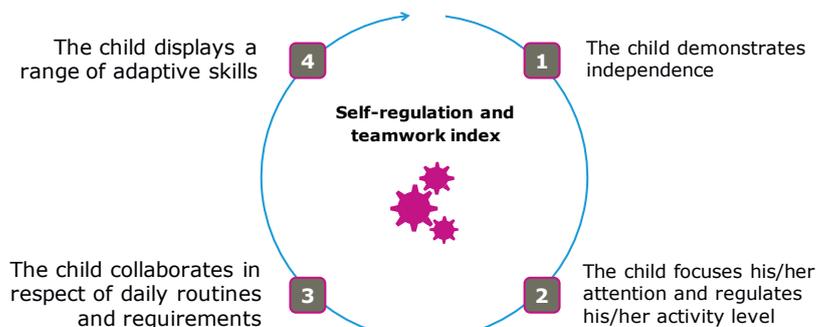
**Figure 1**

Skills held by the child that are covered by the Empathy index



**Figure 2**

Skills held by the child that are covered by the Self-regulation & teamwork index





Significant positive effect of Free of Bullying on the Empathy index



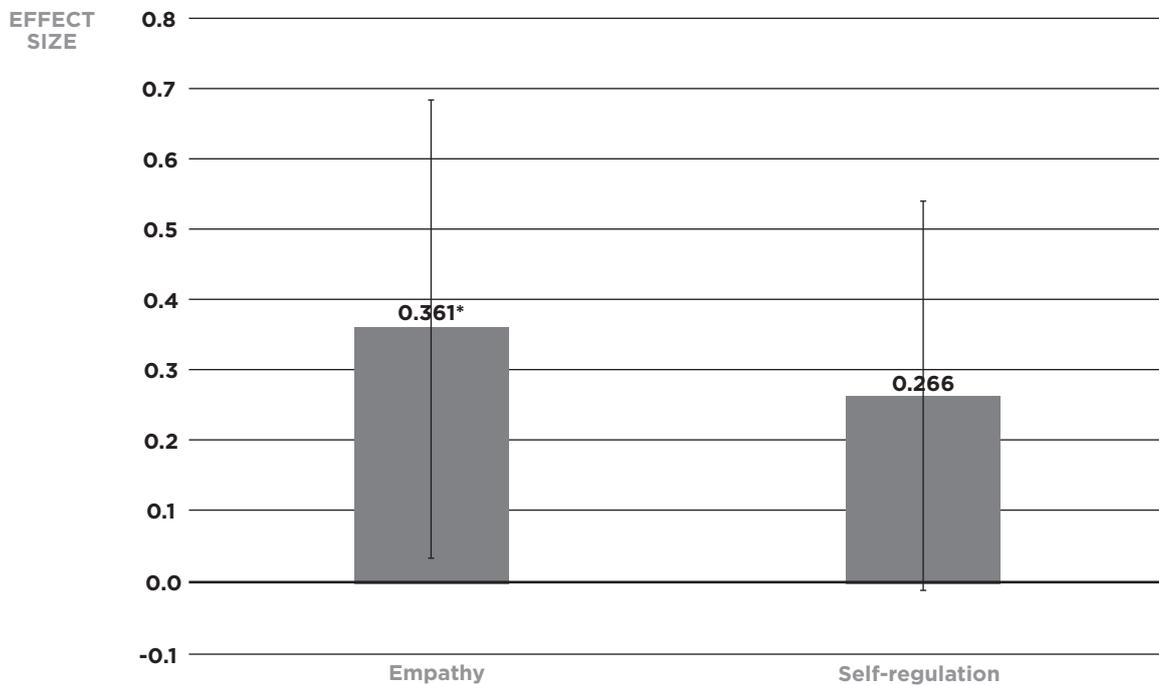
Positive development on the Self-regulation and teamwork index

## THE CHILDREN'S SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS ARE STRENGTHENED

Children in the treatment group experienced substantial benefits from working with Free of Bullying compared to the control group. This was particularly true for children's ability to express their feelings, decode others' feelings and understand other's feelings – which are skills reflected in the empathy index.

**Figure 3**

The effect of Free of Bullying on empathy and self-regulation



Note: \*, \*\*, \*\*\* indicates significance levels for 5, 1 and 0.1 per cent respectively. | indicates 95 per cent confidence interval. Standard errors for the estimates have been adjusted for "clustering" at the preschool level. All estimated models include all control variables as well as "fixed effects" for municipalities.

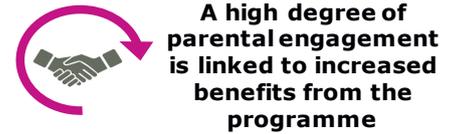
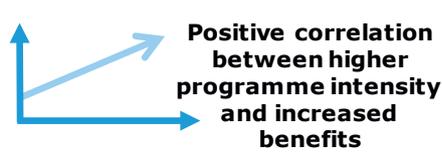
The results show that, on average, children who have participated in the Free of Bullying programme demonstrate a more positive development on the Empathy index compared with the group of children who did not participate in the programme.

The results also indicate that Free of Bullying has a positive effect on the index for the children's self-regulation and teamwork. This effect is not statistically significant, however.

It is important to remember that the two indices reflect six and four underlying subscales, respectively, and thus cover a wide range of the child's skills.

# RESULTS II

## Higher programme intensity increases the benefits



### HIGHER PROGRAMME INTENSITY INCREASES THE BENEFITS

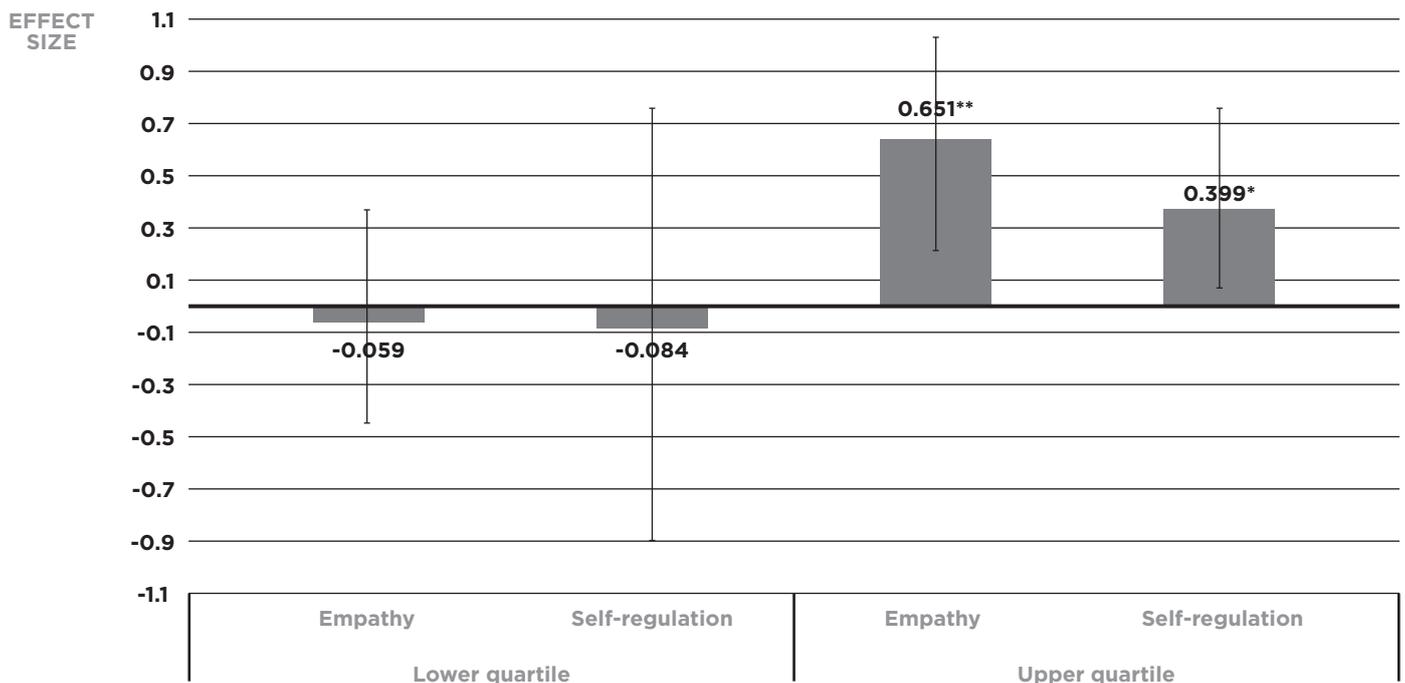
There is significant variation in the extent to which the preschools used the Free of Bullying programme. This variation is reflected in both the number and types of activities.

Across activities, the results of the evaluation show a correlation between higher programme intensity and increased benefits, measured by the strengthening of the children’s socio-emotional skills.

The extent to which parents are engaged in the programme seems to have a particularly strong effect on the impact achieved from participation in the programme. Children from preschools that involved the parents to the greatest extent experienced the largest effects of Free of Bullying, measured for both empathy and self-regulation.

**Figure 4**

The correlation between parental involvement and the effect of Free of Bullying on empathy and self-regulation.



Note \*, \*\*, \*\*\* indicates significance levels for 5, 1 and 0.1 per cent respectively. | indicates 95 per cent confidence interval. Standard errors for the estimates have been adjusted for “clustering” at the preschool level. All estimated models include all control variables as well as “fixed effects” for municipalities.

The results of this subanalysis should be interpreted with a degree of caution, since differences in programme intensity among the different preschools are not necessarily random. In part, the study was not intentionally designed so that the children would participate in the programme to various degrees. In addition, this variation could be linked to the characteristics of the children and/or the preschools. The results linked to programme intensity can therefore not be interpreted as causal links. Nevertheless, results clearly indicate that the intensity with which the preschools use the programme and the types of activities used play a role in the benefits the children get from Free of Bullying.

# CONCLUSION

The results of the impact evaluation of Free of Bullying demonstrate that this anti-bullying campaign has a measurable positive impact on children's socio-emotional skills.

The combined results of the study indicate that working with Free of Bullying has provided substantial benefits to the children in the treatment group compared with those in the control group. This is particularly true for children's ability to express their feelings, decode others' feelings and understand other's feelings - which are skills reflected in the empathy index. The fact that the most substantial impact is connected with the empathy index is not surprising, since this measure is most closely aligned with the focus areas of the Free of Bullying programme.

The study also indicates a correlation between the extent to which the preschools work with the various elements in the programme and the level of impact achieved. Parental involvement appears to be a particularly important element to work with.

This evaluation shows that Free of Bullying is an effectual anti-bullying programme. The programme can therefore have an important role in early preventive efforts against bullying and can support the development of healthy children's groups in which children feel safe, and thereby enhance children's well-being.

## MORE ABOUT BULLYING AND CHILDREN'S SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

For more results from the impact evaluation of Free of Bullying, see the full evaluation report at: [www.friformobberi.dk](http://www.friformobberi.dk)