

At the Social Play Academy, it's important to us that every child who participates in one of our programs feels supported in ways that are both fun and meaningful.

That's why all of our structured social skills programs are built on strategies that research shows can really help children on the Autism Spectrum. We use strategies such as learning through play, using clear visuals, practising social skills with peers, and building confidence in safe and supportive settings.

We weave these approaches into exciting adventures so children aren't just "taught" skills — they get to try them out, share successes with their friends, and grow in ways that feel natural and enjoyable. For us, evidence-based practice means making sure what we do is not only engaging but also genuinely helpful for each child and their family.

### **Evidence-Based Strategies & An Evidence-Informed Approach**

All Social Play Academy programs draw on a wide range of evidence-based strategies and techniques, including (but not limited to) Cognitive-Behavioural Instructional Strategies, Direct Instruction, Modelling, Naturalistic Intervention, Prompting, Peer-Mediated Instruction, Reinforcement, Self-Management, Task Analysis, and Visual Supports.

These approaches are supported by strong research evidence, as outlined in **Autism CRC's National Guideline for Supporting Autistic Children** and the **NDIS's Evidence Review for Early Interventions for Children with Autism**. They also align with the internationally recognised list of **Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism** developed by the US-based **National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice** (NCAEP, 2020).

### **Specific Social Play Academy Research**

While formal research demonstrating the efficacy of our social skills programs has not yet been published, we anticipate releasing results in the first half of 2026. The *Dragons of the Spectrum* Social Skills Program was developed in 2021 by Clinical Psychologist William Ellison and served as the focus of his Clinical Master's research (2020-2021).

The primary limitation of William Ellison's research was related to its **small sample size**. With a limited number of participants, the research was underpowered and unable to achieve strong statistical significance. Nevertheless, the findings were encouraging and provided support for further investigation.



When examining descriptive results, participants who took part in the program demonstrated greater improvements in social skills and resilience compared to those in the control group. Specifically:

- **Engagement and Acceptance:** Children showed a high level of interest and sustained participation in the program, as assessed using their overall attendance, active participation, verbal feedback and homework completion.
- **Social Skills:** The treatment group reported greater increases in social skills compared to the control group, as assessed using the **Social Skills Indicator Scale: Social-Emotional Learning Edition (SSIS-SEL)**.
- **Pro-Social Behaviours:** The treatment group reported greater increases in prosocial behaviours compared to the control group, assessed using the **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)**.
- **Resilience:** The treatment group reported greater increases in resilience compared to the control group, as assessed using the **Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-R)**.

Taken together, these preliminary findings highlight the program's potential effectiveness and justify larger, more rigorous studies to confirm outcomes.

Ellison, W. H. (2021). *A role-playing game-based social skills intervention for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: The "Dragons of the Spectrum" program* (Master's thesis, Charles Sturt University).

Additional data collection is taking place for the 'Dragons of the Spectrum' and 'Alliance of Dragons' programs, to be published in 2026:

- **Dragons of the Spectrum Social Skills Program:**
  - Social Skills Indicator Scale: Social-Emotional Learning Edition (SSIS-SEL)
  - Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-R).
- **Alliance of Dragons Social Skills Program:**
  - Social Skills Indicator Scale: Social-Emotional Learning Edition (SSIS-SEL)
  - Adaptive Behaviour Assessment System - 3rd Edition

The preliminary findings evaluating the efficacy of the **Dragons of the Spectrum Social Skills Program** indicate even greater improvements in social skills than those observed during William Ellison's Clinical Master's Research, as well as consistent improvements in group member's resiliency.

For further information or to join our mailing list in preparation for the publication of our research next year, please feel free to email us at [admin@socialplayacademy.com](mailto:admin@socialplayacademy.com) or visit our website at [www.SocialPlayAcademy.com](http://www.SocialPlayAcademy.com).