

Appendix 1

Description of "Dit ben ik" ("Here I am")

The programme consisted of eight weekly 90-minutes sessions, with seven (group 1) and eight (group 2) participants in a school gym on the university campus. Two trained health professionals (a health psychologist and psychomotor therapist from the cluster for developmental care of the children's hospital) and an intern of the medical psychology department carried out the programme using a detailed manual. Parents were not present during the programme.

The programme aims at the integration of bodily self-awareness, emotional self-experience, cognitive development and social interaction. Using sports and play, children could experience different coping styles. During the sessions, the participants were encouraged to obtain information about their conditions (psycho-education), use relaxation during stressful situations, increase their knowledge of self-management and medical compliance, and enhance social competence and positive thinking through cognitive behavioural techniques.

Each session had a fixed structure and a theme. Each session started with all participants sitting on stability balls and evaluating the previous week in emotional well-being, important events and energy levels. In the first session, the possibility of a time-out was introduced to rest for physical or emotional regulation. After sharing and caring, participants were stimulated to practice through play and sports exercises (e.g., boxing, role-play, acting, making a soap episode, truth-or-dare or ball games). The health professionals modelled active and engaged coping styles. Each session was closed by all participants sitting on the stability balls again while evaluating the session. Feedback from participants and health professionals on the previously mentioned topics and observed behaviour in the session was considered very important in the learning process.

The themes of the sessions were in consecutive order: "Who am I?" (focus on getting to know each other, being able to express yourself and explain your medical condition), "I am good the way I am!" (focus on self-perception of strength and weakness, having a 'solid base',

breathing exercises and self-confidence), "I express myself" (focus on psycho-education on emotions, feelings and expressing these emotions in relation to oneself and others), "I really do (not) dare that!" (focus on coping with insecurity and anxiety), "I do (not) like that!" (focus on recognizing and accepting personal limits in oneself and others, teamwork, showing respect and standing up for oneself), "I take care of myself (in a group)" (focus on coping with difficult situations, setting limits and taking good care of oneself), "I persevere!" (focus on holding on to personal limits, persistence and overcoming fear), and "I can do this ! ". The last lesson was an 'empowering session', parents and friends were invited. The children showed the visitors what they had learned, participated in teaching them new skills, and empowered themselves by breaking a wooden board with their bare hands. Each participant received a graduation speech, in which progress to their own individual goals and new coping styles were discussed.