



School Therapy Dogs

Animal-Assisted Interventions in a School Setting

An 8-week program for Children and Adolescents
Focused on Improving Mental Health

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Not for distribution outside of this research program.

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AAI Introduction

Why this modality? There are several reasons that Animal-Assisted Interventions can be a strength to offer in a school setting.

1. People connect with animals. Just get out your cell phone and take a look at a photo of your pet or an animal you connect with. Unless your dog destroyed your best pair of shoes this morning, simply taking a look at an animal can make us feel happier? That is possible.
2. A positive connection with an animal does change our brain chemistry. In as little as 7 minutes, research has shown decreases in cortisol. Less cortisol means we feel less stress. We also see increases in oxytocin – increasing our sense of belonging. Wait, so working with an animal at school helps students feel less stressed and more like they belong to the school community? Yes.
3. Ok, feeling less stress, feeling connected to others and now – a natural increase in dopamine. That means our students are feeling more motivated. This is not an un-natural increase as seen in playing computer games that is tied to addiction. This is a slow, gradual increase that allows students to try new tools and practice new behaviors.
4. Dogs don't care how much money your family has, the style of your clothes, what religion you believe in, your race, your sexual orientation, your hair color... they might show preferences to individuals who carry dog treats in their pockets. In addition, they may have preferences of settings they work in. Some dogs that thrive in a school environment may disengage working in a hospice setting. Good handlers should be aware of these preferences and align work to these preferences.
5. In addition to the diversity of people therapy dogs work with, they can also support a dynamic scope of different goals. AAI supports work from emotional regulation to divorce groups to crisis response. For our work in this research, we are focusing on improving symptoms of anxiety and/or depression.
6. Research is showing slight decreased attachment to animals in middle school as students focus their attention on peers but we continue to see very positive results for students Kindergarten through High School where AAI is an appropriate intervention.

Research Requests

1. Please help with data collection by assisting students with computer issues and printing off and scanning PROMIS forms etc.
2. Please keep attendance – this will be in your Individual School Folder
3. Please provide notes if something goes outside the norm on your attendance form. Examples would be a fire alarm/lock down drill before or during the session (admin should be letting you know of any drills so we do not have dogs in the building during those times) or a huge hail storm that knocks out power, parents announce a separation or a student's grandparent died. If you think something is going to throw off the data for that week, please make note of it.

4. If you are working with a volunteer therapy dog team, please provide them a copy of this document so they know what is planned for each week. Please do not distribute or share this document outside of our research project. I am creating a similar program that I will share with all the TSD employees working with therapy dogs at a later date and then plan on creating a program for distribution to other districts.

Student Selection

For this research we are going to be focusing on students who may benefit from Tier 2 interventions. We are going to be measuring changes in depression and anxiety. Students do not have to have a diagnosis but the school should have some concerns about their social, emotion or mental health that would place them in the Tier 2 intervention. Some ways students can be identified is through Bloomsights data, teacher or staff referral, parent/guardian referral, self-referral, and/or other behavior or mental health screening data. This list is not all inclusive. Use the system established at your school and potentially add these other identification tools as you see fit.

So, if a student is Tier 2, should we automatically include them in AAI? No. There are a few additional things we need to discover and consider before making that determination.

1. Is the student afraid of dogs? Keep in mind that these brain chemicals change with positive interactions. Both the student and the dog need to enjoy each others' company. You may want to see if a student is afraid of only big red dogs or tiny barking dogs. I've learned that even very young students differentiate one dog from another. I had a student who was bitten by a dog but came to school the next week and wanted to interact with the therapy dog working at our school. He said that Copper was a good dog, never hurt anyone, and he wasn't afraid of him.
2. Is the student allergic to dogs? At the beginning of the school year, I ask my health clerk to run a report of all students indicating they have a pet allergy. I then meet with those parents/guardians to get more information. Can the student physically pet the dog if they wash their hands after? Is the allergy severe enough that the dog should never enter their classroom and they should never have a physical interaction? I've also had parents request to have their child work with a therapy dog because they've seen the benefits. We changed the room, added additional grooming protocols and worked with the child's allergist to have very successful AAI sessions.
3. Does the student have a negative experience with animals? If the student has an animal abuse or cruelty charge, then working in this modality in a school setting is not appropriate. There may be some AAI programs with outside services that can better meet that student's needs.

4. Does the student even like dogs? Do they want to work with a dog? This work is all about the human-animal bond and a student who isn't interested in connecting with a dog is far less likely to make gains in this modality.

About this program

1. It's written by an elementary counselor. I've been working with puppets and celebrating the loss of a 1st tooth for a long time. Those of you working with older students may read some of this text and say – woah, my student would not respond well to that. Please feel free to update language as you see fit. Also, please let me know if something is not working for you or you're not sure what it's ideally going to look like. I'm happy to answer any questions you have and would love your feedback to make this a stronger piece of work.
Jennifer.vonlintel@tsd.org
2. If you are working with a volunteer team, you should be present and involved in the intervention.
3. I will be using the term “student” to mean the children, kids, and adolescents we are working with. The term “counselor” is used to represent the individual leading the intervention. The term “our dog or your dog” is used to represent the therapy dog working with the student. You will probably just use the dog's name. The term “handler” is for the individual who is registered or certified to work with that dog. This may be a volunteer or the counselor working with their own dog and is registered or certified by a therapy dog organization like Canine Community Heroes, Pet Partners, Alliance of Therapy Dogs, HABIC, LAPP, or Caring Canines. **If you need support finding a volunteer team to work with, please let me know. This includes if we are in the middle of the research and the dog or volunteer you are working with is not able to continue.**
4. These sessions can be either individual or group sessions. **Groups are limited to 3 students per dog as best practice.** I've tried larger groups and the dog starts getting really confused on whom to listen to. Counselors may want to stick to individual sessions if the dog they are working with has never experienced a group intervention.
5. This is written for both counselors working with their own dogs and counselors working in the diamond or triad model with a volunteer team. There will be sections highlighted for the volunteer to lead. These are typically sections about providing training or communicating with the dog. If you are a counselor working with your own dog in the triangle model, you'll be covering both the counselor sections and the handler sections.

- a. Triangle Model – counselor, therapy dog, student(s)
 - b. Diamond or Triad Model – counselor, volunteer therapy dog handler, volunteer therapy dog, and student(s)
6. Dogs First / Students Always is the motto that we follow. If for any reason, the dog is showing low-level stress signals during the intervention, pause the intervention and problem solve. Dogs should always have the freedom to move away from the intervention and disengage. This can be simply because the humans keep talking and they are not actively engaged in the moment or they are uncomfortable with the intervention. Please allow the dog to disengage, use it as a learning moment with the student and make some changes to see if the dog will re-engage. If the dog growls, stop the intervention immediately and remove either the dog or the student(s) from the room. Please let me know if that occurs ASAP so we can correct the situation before the next session. That may mean finding a new team or ending AAI sessions for the student. If anyone sees low-level stress signals, and the session can be changed to help the dog, then make those changes as long as the stress signals stop. If stress signals do not stop, end the intervention. *The dog come first. We can always meet student needs in some way* – it may be just that AAI is not the right fit and a different modality is needed.
 7. If you are a counselor who is new to AAI or are just uncertain of what is being asked in these sessions, please feel free to reach out to me for some additional supports.
 8. We use the terms “our dog” or “your dog” in the text. It is expected that you’ll probably just use the dog’s name during interventions.
 9. This is a guidebook for us to use. Please do not feel you have to follow it exactly. Your student may have specific goals that you want to work on related to anxiety and depression. As an example, a student may need support with test anxiety. You may want to adapt or change some of these sessions. Feel free to do so. This is a guideline for us to follow but as a professional, you can modify any part of it.

Basic Parts of the curriculum

1. Materials Needed. This is typically ensuring you have everything set up and have walked through the session with your volunteer therapy dog team if you are working in the Diamond Model.
2. Handler Instructions. These are things that the handler will want to practice with their dog prior to coming into the school for the intervention.

3. Data gathering. There will be some weeks 1,3,5 and 7 where you gather pre and post session data. The forms will be in the students' email. Reminders to collect data will be provided on those weeks but since we don't collect each week, other sessions will be missing this section.
4. AAI Student Handbook. Students will be recording very basic information in this handbook which will be taken home at the last session. Each page is intended to take just a minute or too. This is an item that reminds the student what was covered each week and is intended as a tool when wrapping up the 8 weeks together. Typically, the counselor will hold onto this document each week and then the handbook is given to the student at the end of the last session. A big THANK YOU to Jen Sardinia for putting the handbooks together. There will be references to the handbook in the script. If you elect not to use the handbook, simply disregard those comments in the script.
5. Introduction. This is an introduction to the topic of the session and the activity.
6. Activity. This is the primary interaction with the therapy dog.
7. Discussion. This is a review of the activity and topic of the session
8. Ending Activity. This is a quick interaction to indicate the end of the session and an opportunity to share support for each other until the next session.

Pre-req activities

If you do not teach these as part of your AAI programming, please cover these activities first. If you have several volunteer teams to match with your students, you may want to use these as a way to determine initial bond/best match before beginning the 1st session.

Activity 1: Consent test

Counselor: *Our first activity today is going to be a consent test. We use this to help the communication between ourselves and the animal that we're working with. One of the first things we wanted to discover is if our dog wants to work right now. Are they interested in being part of our time together? Why do you think that would be important? We all have the right to say we want to pause what we are doing or we are uncomfortable. We're going to learn about how our dog can tell us that.*

Handler: *To do a consent test we simply want to invite our dog over and then start petting them. This dog likes to have his ears scratched; sometimes he likes to have a little scratch under the chin we're going to do this for about 10 seconds and then we're going to pause. What did the dog do when you stopped? Did the dog communicate that they want the interaction to continue?*

Depending on the dog's response you can discuss how you interpret the dog's body language. If working with a volunteer let them provide this information.

Activity 2 – Learn how to provide a treat.

Different therapy dog organizations have different rules about giving treats if you have a volunteer team with you at this time please let them lead this section if you have your own protocols for providing a treat use those in lieu of the ones below.

Counselor: *The second activity that we're going to do is learning how to give a dog a treat. There's a number of reasons why we would want to do that. Sometimes the dog just needs a little bit of extra encouragement and sometimes the dog needs a reward for all the hard work they're doing. Being in a school is really complex and can be difficult so we want the dog to know we appreciate their work and they're doing a great job.*

The handler may word this next section differently. There are some organizations that only allow the handler to provide a treat. In that case, the student could request that the dog be given a treat or toy or extra ear scratches for their good work.

Handler: *There are two ways that you could give a dog a treat. The first one is you could place it on an open hand, ask the dog to wait and then say OK. Let the dog have the treat. The second method, if you don't want dog slobber all over your hand, is to ask the dog to wait, put the treat on the floor, and then say OK.*

Would you like to practice this together or are you ready to do it on your own?

Week1: Intro / Get to know each other – Tools to Know Yourself and Your Dog

Focus:

Create strong initial bond and provide safe environment to communicate

Learning Targets:

Intro to dog body language

Materials Needed:

Treats

Student AAI Handbook

Student computer

Camera to take picture of student and dog

(if photo release authorizes you to do so)

Timeline:

Pre-session data collection – completed in classroom prior to introduction to therapy dog team

Introduction – 5 minutes

Activity – Friendly Introductions – 15 minutes

Closing Activity – picture – 5 minutes

Post-data – 5 minutes

Week 1:

Pre-session data collection – completed in classroom prior to introduction to therapy dog team

Introductions 5 minutes

Counselor: Hello! How are you doing today? Do you know what we are about to do? We're kicking off our weekly therapy dog training sessions. You'll be helping our dog be a better School Therapy Dog and feel more comfortable at school. To start off, we're just going to get to know each other better This is "handler's name" and our dog "insert dog's name".

Handler: Would you be comfortable petting our dog? We can do a consent test to see if our dog is ready to interact.

Allow for physical interaction if both dog and student are comfortable. Allow for physical interaction to continue into next discussion.

Counselor: How do you think we would get to know a dog better? Could we ask about how old they are, what things they like to do, how they like to interact with people? What do you think the dog needs to know about us?

If no answers are presented by the student, have the handler share the dog's age, favorite food, favorite toy, etc.. Allow handler to share any information about themselves such as a hobby or other animals they like.

Allow student to share information about themselves or any pets they have.

Activity – Friendly Introductions - 15 minutes

Counselor: During our time together we are going to be trying new things and seeing if they work or not. It's going to be like doing different experiments. We're going to write down what works or doesn't work in this Student AAI Handbook. Today we're going to experiment communicating with our dog. I want you to think about how you would communicate with your dog know that you want to be friends.

Let student talk about how they might communicate with a dog to let them know they want to be friends.

Counselor: How do we communicate this same message with people?

Let student answer.

Counselor: Let's pick 2 ways that we communicate to **people** that we want to be friends.

Let student choose 2 ways or suggest trying a wave hello or saying hello.

Counselor: Let's try those 2 ways with a human and then with our dog.

Try both ways. If it's just you and the student, then the student would get feedback about how you interpreted the communication as a human. If you are working in a group or the diamond model, the student can ask another peer or the handler. After trying the experiment with a human, use the same communication (wave or say hello) with the dog. If the dog didn't respond, then write the trial in the people side. If the dog did respond then write the trial in the shared part of the circle.

Counselor: *Now let's pick 2 ways to communicate that you want to be friends with a dog and give them a try with both a person and our dog.*

Try the first way to communicate with a human. If the tool is to gently slap your leg and say "come" how would a human respond? Then use the ways to communicate with the dog.

Counselor: *Communicating with dogs is usually different than communicating with humans. (For older students you may want to mention that communicating with a dog can be similar to communicating with a 3-year old). Sometimes, our dog won't understand what we are trying to communicate and that's OK. Sometimes our dog will understand but won't always follow our cues. That's OK too. Our work in these sessions isn't about making a dog do whatever we ask, it's about building connections.*

Over the next few weeks we're going to talk about different ways to communicate with your dog called cues, so you and your dog can operate as a team.

Ending Activity – 5 minutes

Picture – polaroid – for Student AAI Handbook. Trading card to be given to student if available. Otherwise offer second picture.

Counselor: *Since we have our handbook out can we take a picture of you and/or your dog for the picture page? Would you like a 2nd picture to take with you?*

Post-session data collection – 5 minutes

Counselor: *While we wait for the pictures to develop, let's open our computer and think about how we are feeling about this time spent with your dog.*

Direct students to the Post-session data collection site. Please assist with logging in or any reading/terminology questions.

Counselor: *Thank you for answering these questions. We're looking forward to seeing you next week.*

Week 2: Our body and thoughts

Focus: Introduction to our emotions and how they impact our body

Using the term “Cue” – we use the term cue in lieu of “command”. When you think about the different meanings of these words, the “cue” term aligns better with our building of connection. We also have several students with backgrounds of having adults do things that they did not want to do or felt very uncomfortable with. By using “cue” we set the stage for having boundaries. A “cue” is an ask. Not a demand.

Learning Targets:

- Introduction to cues

- How often do I think about how I'm feeling?

- How does my body feel when I'm familiar with something?

- Does that change with something new?

- Recognizing my changing emotions

Materials Needed:

- Treats

- Pre-discussion with volunteer handler about what cues to use

- 2nd cue selection

Assessment: no data collection this week

Timeline:

- Introduction – 5 minutes

- Activity – 20 minutes

- Closing activity – 5 minutes

Session 2: Our feeling and our body's signals

Introduction: 5 minutes

Counselor: Welcome back. I think our dog missed working with you this past week. (Reintroduce to volunteer handler and dog if needed).

Handler: Would you like to brush or pet our dog? While you're petting him, I wanted to share a quick story with you. (Tell a positive story of something that happened in the dog's life this past week.)

Counselor: Do you have any stories to share with our dog

Activity – Known and unknown cue – 20 minutes

Counselor: Today we are going to learn about cues. These are ways that we ask our dog to do something. Do you think that our dog is listening for a direction right now? (wait for answer/have quick discussion) Dogs are pretty used to having humans talk a bunch and it's usually not about them so they don't have to pay close attention. A cue is used to let a dog know we are going to ask them something and we would like them to listen.

Handler: Before we give a cue, we want to say the dog's name. This helps them understand that we're not talking just between humans anymore and we want them to be part of our communication. Let's see what our dog does when we say his name.

Say dog's name. Dog should indicate they are engaged by looking at the student or handler.

Handler: Now we are going to communicate with our body language and words. We're going to ask our dog to "sit".

Provide guidance on what body language the dog understands for the sit cue. If the dog hesitates, ensure the student knows it is OK. Work together to help the dog understand what is being asked. This should be a well-known cue. Many times, the dog will sit without the cue. You can then emphasize the connection between the student and the dog. "Wow, he already knew what you were going to ask. What a great team you are."

Practice the sit cue 3 or 4 times. Allow for a treat at the end if desired.

Counselor: Good work. Let's pause for a minute and think about our feelings and any signals from our body. Our body can give us clues about how we are feeling. Let's look first at our dog. Do you think he is having a comfortable or uncomfortable feeling? How do you think his body feels? Is his body giving him any clues about his feelings? Is he looking relaxed or tense? (allow to answer questions/ handler may provide additional insights). Now let's think about our own bodies. Are you feeling comfortable or

uncomfortable? Is there any part of your body that you notice in this moment? (give student time to answer questions)

Counselor: Now we are going to try a cue that our dog doesn't know very well or hasn't done in a while. Do you think your dog might get confused? Let's keep an eye on his body language and see.

Handler: We are going to try a ___(cue you haven't practiced in a while)_____.

Walk student through the cue, allow the dog to get a little confused, you may see some low-level stress signals. This is great to point out to the student. Our goal is not to get the dog to do the cue but to see low level stress signals in a safe environment.

Counselor: Let's pause here. How is our dog doing? How do you think their body is feeling, what are they thinking? (allow for response) How is your body doing? How are your thoughts? When we try new things, our bodies send us signals saying – hold up this is not going smoothly. We're going to be using some tools to help our dog feel more comfortable trying new things. Do you have any ideas on how to help them feel better right now? (take a break, get support, go back to "sit")

Use a tool and see if the dog changes their body language. The handler should assist the student in helping the dog in returning to a confident and calm state.

Counselor: I love seeing these tools work. Great job. Let's do a quick human check. How are you feeling? How is your body? (allow for discussion Lets take a minute and write the results of today's work in the Student AAI Handbook.

(if using the AAI Student Handbook, complete the page for this week)

Handler: It's time for our dog to wrap up for today. We have a special wrapping up activity that I'd like to teach you. (Explain your wrapping up activity. This could be a cue that asks the dog to "wave" goodbye. It could be playing a quick "find it" game)

Week 3: Changing Thoughts Reframing Tools

Focus:

What are our thoughts or self-talk? Can they help us feel more or less comfortable?

Introduction of reframing our thinking.

Learning Targets:

Introduction of reframing

Materials Needed:

Student computer

Student AAI Handbook

Handler Instructions

Work on previous weeks' cue that your dog may have struggled with. We want the student to see improvement from when they tried last week to this week's work.

Timeline

Pre-session data collection – completed in classroom prior to introduction to therapy dog team

Introduction: 5 min

Pre-discussion: 5 min

Main Activity: 10 min

Closing Activity: 5 min

Post-data collection: 5 min

Week 3: Changing Thoughts – Reframing Tool

Data Collection Week: Please have student complete pre-session data prior to meeting with the therapy dog.

Introduction: 5 minutes

Counselor: Welcome back. I think our dog missed working with you this past week.

Handler: Would you like to brush or pet our dog? While you're petting him, I wanted to share a quick story with you. (Tell a positive story of something that happened in the dog's life this past week.)

Counselor: Do you have any stories to share with our dog

Activity

Pre-discussion – 5 minutes

Counselor: Today we are going to be exploring our self-talk. Many humans start using negative self-talk when things are getting difficult or are hard to do. We don't think that dogs have self-talk because they don't a complex spoken language but we can imagine what they might say. What do you think he is thinking? (Example may be, I love getting treats and being at school). Thinking about a situation through our dog's experience may help us think about our own self-talk. As an example let's find out what our dog might worry about. (ask handler to share a story about something our dog worries about – losing a toy, burying a bone and then not being able to find it)

Handler: (share story about a worry your dog has)

Counselor: Now let's think about what the dog might be thinking? What could their self-talk sound like? (allow student to answer). Is this thinking positive or negative? (allow for discussion and see if student can provide an example of both positive and negative thinking). What would make the dog feel most comfortable – positive or negative thoughts and why does that matter? How does that impact their life? (allow for discussion)

Main Activity - 10 minutes

Counselor: Now we're going to do more communicating with our dog. Do you remember the cues we learned last week? (have student state cues/ help with details if they have forgotten).

Handler: We started with "sit" last week. Let's see if our dog remembers that one. (assist student with sit cue if needed). Great, now we're going to move on to some other cues that our dog knows. Let's see if they understand when you give the cue.

(teach the student 2-3 other well-known cues like down, stay, come. Share positive body language you see with your dog during these well-known cues)

Counselor: You are doing great. Let's do a quick check in. How do you think our dog is feeling? What signals tell you that? *(allow to answer)* How are you feeling? Is your body telling you anything? OK, now if our dog had self-talk, what would he be saying to himself? Does that match your thoughts or self-talk? *(allow to answer and then discuss)* Let's put a little challenge in here. Let's go back to that tough cue from last week. Before we start are you having any changes in your feelings or thoughts? *(discuss any changes – if negative, ask what positive thoughts the dog might have since they LOVE working with the student, getting treats and being even better School Therapy Dogs – they may need help with thinking about a positive way to state it)* What can we do to make this a positive experience for our dog? *(speak clearly, keep a calm body, give encouragement)*

Handler: Let's see if we can remind our dog what harder cue we were working on. *(assist student with harder cue if needed)*

Counselor: How do you think that went? How are you feeling? Any signals from your body? What are your thoughts or self-talk? A good human tool is reframing thoughts. If our dog is thinking, "I'll never get this! I'm a bad dog!" is that healthy or not-healthy? How could he reframe his thoughts? What about our own self-talk? Can we reframe our thoughts when new things get frustrating? Reframing our thoughts can help us feel more comfortable.

(if using the AAI Student Handbook, complete the page for this week)

Ending Activity – 5 minutes

Counselor: You and your dog have done some great communicating today and faced a challenge together. It's hard work for our dog. On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you think our dog did today? Let's do an activity that our dog likes as a reward.

Handler: Let's play a quick game of (find it or other game the dog enjoys). Teach the student how to play the game.

Ending session data collection – 5 minutes

Counselor: It's time to open our computer and answer a couple questions about how we are feeling in this moment

Week 4: Asking for Help

Focus:

This week we will examine how our dogs indicate asking for help and who they may ask for help from. We'll also explore what it feels like to be on the other side of asking for help – being the person that provides the help.

Learning Targets:

Identify dog body language that indicates our dog would like or would not like some help

Discuss asking for help and identify people in our lives that can help us in different situations

Experience what it feels like to help someone

Materials Needed:

AAI Student Handbook

Timeline

Introduction: 5 min

Activity Pre-discussion: 5 min

Activity: 20 min

Closing Activity: 5 min

Week 4: Problems that are in or out of our control – asking for help – problem solving and empathy skills

Introduction: 5 minutes

Counselor: *Welcome back.*

Handler: *Hello. Our dog has been looking for you. I think he heard you coming down the hallway. Do you want to say hello? He's had a bit of an adventure this week. (Share positive story)*

Counselor: *Do you have any stories to share with our dog?*

Handler: *If there is time, review cues from last week.*

Activity

Pre-discussion – 5 minutes

Counselor: *This week we're going to learn how to tell if our dog needs our help. Dogs really don't have much control over their lives. Humans are in charge of basic things like food. They can ask us for a snack or a meal, but usually they can't get it themselves. What else do you think they don't have control over? What do they have control over? (look to handler to provide additional details if the student can't name anything.*

Handler: *There are a few things that our dog does have control over. (Picking with toys to play with. Spitting out food they don't like).*

Counselor: *Let's think about our own lives. What are some things that we do have control over? What are some things that we don't have control over? Today, we're going to focus on what tools we have if we feel like things are out of our control. One tool is asking for help and it can help build trust between two beings. When we ask for help and someone helps us, it can build a healthy bond between the being in need and the being that's helping.*

Activity – 20 minutes

Handler: *Today we're going to create a situation that is out of the control of our dog. We're going to play ball for a short time and then have the ball roll under the cabinet where the dog can't get it. (or use another example that better suits the dog and environment like playing find-it with a treat hidden in a difficult spot). What body language do you think we'll see when the dog realizes the ball is under the cabinet? What do you think the dog will do next? (Lead activity and observe dog's reaction.*

If the dog looks to the handler for assistance, ask the student to lend a hand.

If the dog looks to the student for assistance, provide encouragement to help if they hesitate.

If the dog gives up or starts showing stress signals trying to get the ball. Ask the student to observe their dog's body language now, and then observe body language after the student gets the ball for them.

Counselor: What did you notice about how your dog handled the situation? Did the dog ask for help? How do you think your dog felt when you got the ball back for them? Let's play again and see if anything changes. (play the game 1 or 2 more times depending on time constraints)

Did anything change? How do you think your dog felt about getting help?

What do you do when something is out of your control but impacting your life?

Do you ask for help? Which people do you tend to go to when you need a hand?

How did you feel helping your dog when the ball rolled under the cabinet?

How do you think other people feel when they get an opportunity to help?

What can get in the way of asking for help?

What makes it hard for people to ask for help?

(if using the AAI Student Handbook, complete the page for this week)

Ending Activity – 5 minutes

Handler: It's time for your dog to say goodbye for the week. Thank you for helping your dog today. They really trust you and enjoy this time with you, even if it's a little frustrating. You made them feel so much better when you helped them. (lead ending activity)

Week 5: Tools grounding / mindfulness

Focus:

Mindfulness helps people become less reactive to negative internalization and become more reflective to their thoughts. It focuses the brain so our minds don't wander. It keeps us in the moment and can help with self-regulation.

Learning Targets:

Dog senses

Why Mindfulness works

Materials Needed:

Decent weather: the activity is a "sniffari" which ideally should be held outside. However, if the weather is awful, an indoor sniffari walking through the school would be OK.

Second "student" leash

Please be aware of insurance issues with most volunteer organizations. In most cases, handlers must hold leashes at all times. In other cases, dogs may work off-leash if working in a room with the door closed. Students are not allowed to be holding the primary leash outside of a closed room, even if the handler is right next to them. To work around this, many teams will train dogs to walk with 2 leashes attached to their harness. The primary leash that the handler holds onto, and a secondary "student" leash. This model may not be appropriate for older students who may elect to just walk next to the dog but not hold a leash.

AAI Student Handbook

Timeline

Pre-session data collection – prior to intervention starting

Introduction: 5 min

Pre-activity discussion: 5 min

Activity: 10

Closing: 5

Post-data collection: 5 min

Week 5: Mindfulness

Data Collection Week: Please have student complete pre-session data prior to meeting with the therapy dog.

Introduction: 5 minutes

Counselor: *Welcome back. I hope your week is going well. Your dog was so excited to come back into the school today to see you.*

Handler: *While you're greeting your dog, let me tell you about how excited they were to come today. (Tell a story about the dog getting excited to get in the car or how they knew you were turning to come to the school.)*

Counselor: *Do you have any stories to share with our dog*

Handler: *Practice a few cues if time permits*

Pre – Activity: 5 minutes

Counselor: *Today we're going to talk about how your dog explores their world. They have much more sensitive noses and ears than we do but can't see all the colors we can. They also have a strange way of telling time with their nose. As we learn about their senses we're also going to think about how they live in the moment and how that can be healthy for people too.*

Handler: *I wish I could spend just a few moments in your dog's brain just to have a better idea of how they experience the world. Most dogs explore their world through their nose. (tell a story about how your dog did something amazing through scent or as an example say that dogs can smell the prints of other animals and based on which print is stronger, they can tell what direction the other animal is traveling). Dogs can only see blues, yellows and limited greens, everything else is gray. They can also hear sounds that humans can't hear. They experience life in the moment. They don't think about what we did last week or what we might do next week. They are focused on what is happening in the right now.*

Counselor: *Many people practice being like a dog. They want to spend time only thinking about what is happening in the moment. Why do you think people practice that? (our brains can get overwhelmed thinking about what happened earlier or start getting worried about something that may happen in our future. When we spend time in present, those thoughts get our brain's focus and our minds don't wander to other thoughts)*

Activity: Sniffari 15 minutes

Handler: Today we are conducting a Sniffari. This is taking an outdoor walk with your dog but allowing them to lead the walk. We don't need to keep walking. When your dog stops, we stop. This is a great brain activity for dogs. It's like us walking through Eitches or the rides at a fair. Our brain does a lot of work thinking about what our eyes see. When a dog goes outside, their brain does a lot of thinking about the world around them.

Counselor: As we're walking today, we're going to try to use our noses a bit more. When you see your dog stop and sniff the air, see if you can smell anything. Notice your dog's nose moving. Can you see what they have stopped to sniff? Can you smell what they are so interested in? Our goal is to find 5 things that we can smell. Sometimes you can sniff something but it really doesn't have a smell. Those don't count. We want to explore with our noses. (if students are struggling, let them know that smells are stronger closer to the ground. You may kneel with them and smell the ground. If you can't smell vegetation outside, try breaking off a leaf or a stem. That can release a stronger smell. Another option is to wash your hands and then see if you can smell the soap on your hands)

As activity is winding up....

Counselor: What has your brain been busy doing for the last few minutes? Have you been able to just be in this moment with your dog? Many people practice being in the moment by using a 5-4-3-2-1 tool. They look for 5 things, hear 4 things, touch 3 things with texture, smell 2 things and taste one thing. After some practice this tool is very useful to help your brain settle unpleasant thoughts.

(if using the AAI Student Handbook, complete the page for this week)

Closing Activity – 5 minutes

Handler: Since we've been talking about smell today, let's give your dog a treat before we wrap up. Have you ever taken a moment and smelled dog treats? Companies make them scents that dogs love. What do you think about this smell?

Data Collection – 5 minutes

Counselor: It's time to collect some data about how you are feeling about your time with your dog today. Let's get out your computer and answer these couple questions.

Week 6: Tools muscle relaxation

Focus:

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a direct way to address the fight/flight/freeze symptoms. The theory behind muscle relaxation is that you cannot have the feeling of relaxation and warm well-being in your body and at the same time experience anxiety symptoms. With practice, students become more aware of when they are experiencing tension and will have a tool to help them feel relaxed.

Learning Targets:

Tellington T-Touch

Why muscle relaxation works

Materials Needed:

Computer for YouTube video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0T8TQ6YdKsQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNyyca1EmZM>

Optional: pulse oximeter

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Handler Notes:

Practice Tellington T Touch with your dog prior to today's session so they have experience with the touches in these videos and are comfortable with the exercise.

Timeline

Introduction: 5 min

Pre-activity: 5 min

Activity: 15 min

Closing: 5 min

Week 6: Body relaxation

Introduction: 5 minutes

Counselor: Welcome back. I hope your week is going well.

Handler: While you're greeting your dog, I'd like to share a story about your dog. (tell a positive story.)

Counselor: Do you have any stories to share with our dog

Handler: Practice a few cues if time permits

Pre – Activity: 5 minutes

Counselor: This week we're going to learn about Tellington TTouch.

Handler: Many professional handlers use this to relax their dog after hard work. As an example, if a search and rescue dog had been working all day using its nose and moving through the woods looking for a lost hiker, they're going to be stressed and exhausted. Their handlers want to take very good care of them so they use this. Tellington T Touch can be very comforting for dogs.

Counselor: Sometimes our bodies tell us that we are stressed out. Our muscles get tight, our breathing gets faster, and we may get stomach aches or headaches. When we can calm our bodies down, it helps our brains move away from a flight, fight, freeze response, and makes us feel better. Our aches and pains can actually just go away. We're going to test to see how well Tellington T Touch works with your dog.

Activity: 15 minutes

Handler: First we need to get your dog's heart rate up a bit. Let's play a fun game that gets them moving. (play an active game that will allow the student to see the dog moving and breathing faster. If the student is willing, have them use a pulse oximeter and measure how fast their heart is beating)

Let's get a sense of how our dog's body is feeling. A "1" is they are totally relaxed. A "5" is they are moving into yellow zone – their body is moving faster. A "10" is they are totally stressed out and in red zone.

Now I'm going to turn on a Tellington T Touch video and we will do Tellington T Touch with your dog and see if they get more relaxed.

Watch video and help instruct student if necessary – have student continue T Touch if dog and student is willing while you have the next discussion.

Counselor: Wow, your dog looks very relaxed. What number would you give them now? (1-10 scale) How do you think your dog feels? Do you want to see if your heart rate changed?

What communication did your dog give you during this activity?

What thoughts were popping up for you during this activity? Could you stay in the moment?

How does your body feel now? We won't always have a dog to do T Touch with. What other ways can you relax your body? (Discussion about what you do to slow down and relax – puzzle, breathing, pet a dog, drawing, music)

Sometimes it's very hard for humans to tell when dogs are hurting or injured. Some people think it's part of their history when they didn't want to let predators know they couldn't run as fast so they wouldn't be targeted. Have you known someone who answered "I'm good" when they are asked how they're feeling, when really they're not doing good at all? Why do you think some people do that?

(if using the AAI Student Handbook, complete the page for this week)

Ending Activity – 5 minutes

Handler: *Thank you so much for your work this week. I think your dog feels like they had a doggie spa day. Would you like to give them a treat before you go?*

Week 7: Using tools – Rally Course

Focus:

Rally is a dog sport where the team (student and dog) navigates a course that has different signs “stations” with cues on them for the team to follow. It can be a good tool for working on emotional regulation, focus/attention skills, and planning/organization/executive functioning. It can create a sense of accomplishment for students and build a stronger bond between them and their dog.

Learning Targets:

The student can apply what they have been learning through this intervention to this dog sport activity.

When the student is able to stay calm and focused, the dog will stay calm and focused. Using tools to stay relaxed, have positive thoughts/self-talk, and focused will help the dog feel comfortable with this new activity.

Handler Directions:

Review the cues that the student used in prior weeks with your dog prior to today's session.

Materials Needed:

Computer to watch Rally video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbtxFLeMEL0>

Student computer for pre-post data collection

Rally course

Cones or other items to mark course

Rally cards with cues from weeks 2-3 written on them

AAI Student Handbook

Timeline

Pre-session data collection – prior to intervention with the therapy dog

Introduction: 5

Activity: 15 min

Post-Data: - FOR THIS WEEK IT IS COMPLETED PRIOR TO THE CLOSING ACTIVITY 5 min

Closing: 5 min

Week 7: Rally Course

Data Collection Week: Please have student complete pre-session data prior to meeting with the therapy dog.

Introduction: 5 minutes

Counselor: Welcome back. I hope your week is going well.

Handler: While you're greeting your dog, I'd like to share a story about your dog. (tell a positive story.)

Counselor: Do you have any stories to share with our dog

Activity: 15 minutes

Counselor: Today we are introducing a Rally course. Many people compete in Rally with their dogs. Some people do it for fun and others get very competitive. Teams can win awards and titles. Let's watch a quick video of what it looks like. (Watch first 1:30 or so of video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbtxFLeMEL0>

Handler: Do you have any questions about the video? You've been working on a few cues with your dog. Let's review them and make sure we have a sign made for each cue. (You may have signs made in advance or allow students to write the cues on a card)

Counselor: What thoughts are popping up for you? Is your body feeling calm? It will help to keep your focus on the present and a calm body when going through this course. Since this is the first course we're going to set up, it will be brand new to both you and your dog. Our goal is to have fun and build your communication and trust with your dog. Are you ready?

Handler: First we need to set up the course. Can you pick 4 cues that you want to put in the course? Now you can place them in different parts of the room. You and your dog will move from station 1 to station 2, then 3 and then 4. Since your dog can't read, they will be counting on you to communicate what cue they need to do at each station.

Let's do a practice run and see how it goes. (Walk through course without your dog)

Are you ready to try it with your dog?

(student takes the therapy dog through the course)

Counselor: Wow. That was a great first run. How do you think your dog is feeling? Are they showing any stress signals? Is there a part of the course they need some help with?

How are you feeling? Is your body calm? Do you have any questions or need some help with any station?

Let's run through it again.

Handler: I think your dog is getting the hang of this. You two are a good team. (point out where the team did a good job)

Run through course again if time permits or try adding another cue.

Counselor: Great work today. How do you think you did? Did your ability to stay focused and relaxed impact your dog?

(if using the AAI Student Handbook, complete the page for this week)

Data Collection: 5 min

Let's take a moment to answer a few questions about how you feel. (collect post data)

Closing Activity: 5 min

Handler: It's time for us to say goodbye until next week. Next week we will build on your Rally course. It will also be our last week together for these sessions. Do you want to give your dog a treat for all the hard work they did today?

Week 8: Reflection on what was learned

Focus: Working together as a team, knowing yourself

Learning Targets:

Reflection and Closure

Materials Needed:

Rally course materials from last week

Camera to take photo of student and dog (if allowed)

AAI Student Handbook (goes home this week)

Timeline

Intro: 5 min

Activity Intro: 5 min

Activity: 15 min

Closing Activity: 5 min

Week 8 : Knowing Our Dog and Ourselves

Introduction: 5 minutes

Counselor: Welcome back. I have some mixed feelings this week. It's our last session together with your dog.

Handler: I'm having mixed feelings too. You've done such a wonderful job getting to know your dog. Let's spend a little time just hanging out together and connecting.

Counselor: How are you feeling?

Activity Intro: 5 minutes

Counselor: We've been focusing on many different topics over the weeks we've been together.

We've learned how to communicate with our dog, knowing when they might be confused or when they are having fun. We've learned about using Tellington T Touch when our dog might be stressed, about how our dog has an amazing nose and lives pretty much in the moment. We learned about Rally work and becoming a team with our dog. We've also learned about ourselves. How our emotions are tied to signals from our body and how our thoughts can impact how we feel. We talked about asking for help and using tools to keep our bodies and thoughts calm so we can feel better.

Activity – 15 minutes

Handler: We're going to celebrate all our work with another Rally course. You can put any cues you and your dog have learned into the course in any order. Let's get that set up now.

(go through a practice run and then have the student take the dog through course)

Counselor: How did that go? Did your dog struggle with any part of the course? Did you struggle? What adjustments do you want to make?

(make adjustments and go through course again)

Handler: Great work! Your dog really enjoys working with you. I feel like I want to capture this moment. Can we take a picture of you and your dog for you to have?

(if using the AAI Student Handbook, add this picture to the final page and allow student to take home)

Counselor: What made this such a big success? Can you use anything from working with your dog to other parts of your life?

Ending: 5 minutes

Handler: *It's time for us to say farewell for now. We really like this school though. If we come back, can we ask to see you? Let's play a game of find-it (or other game the dog loves)*

Play game and then have student give the dog a farewell treat.