



Canine Comprehension - Information for Parents

Thank you for enrolling your child in the Canine Comprehension School Group Program. Supporting your child's involvement in this program is a significant first step to allowing them to explore their emotional expression and connect positively with their learning environment.

Some children have difficulty at school and struggle with learning and friendships. Through weekly attendance at our Group Program, your child may have more positive feelings about themselves and school. The presence of a dog makes awkward or tough conversations easier because the focus is not on the students. As a result, your child may feel less anxious, more in control of their emotions, or have made some new friends.

Topics explored

- Motivation - e.g., what motivates us; what is internal vs. external motivation; what motivates the dogs; how can we use motivation and incentives to promote positive thinking and behaviour?
- Feelings - e.g., what they are; what we call them; how we express them; the benefits of sharing with others; strategies for managing strong ones.
- Thoughts - e.g., what is positive vs. negative thinking; how does our thinking affect how we feel and behave; what control do we have over our thinking?
- Communication - e.g., how we respect others when they are talking; effective ways of getting the attention of others; strategies for boosting confidence when speaking; actively practising through teaching commands and tricks to the dog.
- Mindfulness - e.g., following a guided meditation; colouring; journalling or writing; drawing.

What this means

Students have been given a greater awareness of their feelings and how to name them. They have been encouraged to communicate these feelings to people through productive means (such as talking and sharing) rather than dysfunctional means (acting out, yelling, swearing or physically hurting others or property). They have taken time to identify strategies that can help when they are feeling strong or negative feelings. They may have even started practising these strategies in between our weekly sessions together.

What you might notice

- Your child starts to talk more about their feelings and has words to name them.
- Your child shares detail about the dog and the things they have taught the dog to do. This is likely accompanied by excitement, but they could also express frustration that they aren't achieving what they hoped.
- Your child explains that they need time or space from you. This could be a coping strategy they are implementing to manage strong feelings positively.
- Your child's mood hasn't improved overall, perhaps just on the days of the Group Program.

What's helpful for you to know:

We talk a lot with students about strategies and techniques they can use to reduce negative feelings and increase positive ones. It can be helpful for children and young people to have a few supportive people in their life who know



what these strategies and techniques are. As such, ask your child about one or two of them so that when they encounter a challenge, you can suggest a tool to help.

Anxiety is a genuine concern for children and young people, and it is alarmingly common. They will feel more supported to deal with their strong feelings if the people around them validate their experiences and show understanding. Refrain from saying, “Don’t worry about it” or “Brush it off” and instead demonstrate support through statements such as, “That must be hard” or “Tell me more about that”, even if you can’t truly understand what they’re going through.