

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THEIR FIRST SESSION



with Canine Comprehension

TOPICS COVERED

1 Introduction to therapy dogs

2 Preparing the environment

3 Teaching appropriate interaction

4 Addressing potential concerns

5 Follow-up and reflection

6 Thank You



INTRODUCTION

To begin, it's crucial to provide students with a basic understanding of therapy dogs and their role. In our programs, we've found that students who are well-informed about therapy dogs tend to have more positive interactions.



Explain that therapy dogs are specially trained to provide comfort and support in various settings, including schools.

Benefits of therapy dogs: Highlight how therapy dogs can help reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance social interactions.

Differences from pets: Clarify that while therapy dogs are friendly, they have a specific job and require different treatment than regular pets.

Examples of therapy dog work: Share stories or examples of how therapy dogs have helped students in other schools or settings.

This introduction will help set the stage for students, giving them context for the upcoming interaction and potentially increasing their enthusiasm and comfort level.

PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT

Creating the right environment is key to a successful first session with a therapy dog. Based on our experiences at Canine Comprehension, we suggest the following preparations:

You can choose an appropriate space: Select a quiet, spacious area where students can safely interact with the dog without feeling crowded or overwhelmed.

Remove potential distractions: Clear the area of items that might distract the students or the dog, ensuring focus on the interaction.

Set up comfortable layout: Arrange floor seating in a semi-circle to allow all students to see and interact with the dog quickly. We encourage students to sit on the floor, creating a more relaxed atmosphere.



TEACHING APPROPRIATE INTERACTION

Proper interaction with the therapy dog is crucial for the safety and comfort of both the students and the dog.

Drawing from our WAIT (Wait, Ask, Invite, Touch) principle, we recommend the following approach:

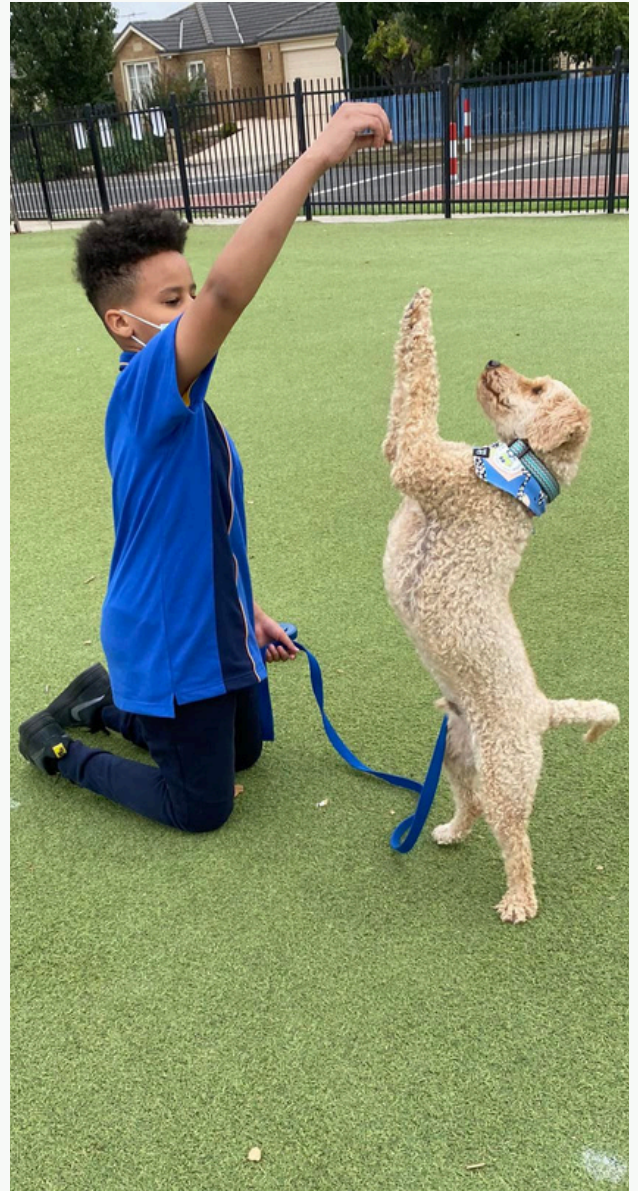
- **Wait:** Teach students to pause and observe the dog before approaching.
- **Ask:** Instruct students to ask the handler for permission to interact with the dog.
- **Invite:** Show students how to invite the dog to approach by offering their hand for the dog to sniff.
- **Touch:** Demonstrate proper petting techniques, emphasising gentle touches.



TEACHING APPROPRIATE INTERACTION

- 1. Practise calm behaviour:**
Encourage students to use quiet voices and slow movements around the dog.
- 2. Demonstrate proper petting:**
Show students how to pet the dog gently, avoiding sensitive areas like the face and tail.
- 3. Teach respect for the dog's space:** Explain the importance of not crowding or overwhelming the dog.
- 4. Role-play interactions:** Have students practise these techniques with each other before the dog arrives.

By teaching these interaction skills, we ensure that students are prepared to engage with the therapy dog in a safe and respectful manner, enhancing the experience for everyone involved.



ADDRESSING CONCERNS

It's important to anticipate and address any concerns that students, parents, or staff might have about the therapy dog session. Based on common questions we've encountered, I suggest covering the following points:



Allergies: Explain measures taken to minimise allergen exposure, such as regular grooming of the therapy dog and providing alternative activities for allergic students.

Fear of dogs: Assure students that interaction is voluntary and that they can observe from a distance if they're uncomfortable. Offer strategies for gradual exposure if desired.

Hygiene concerns: Detail the cleanliness protocols for the therapy dog and the hygiene practices in place for students (e.g., hand sanitising before and after interactions).

Behavioural expectations: Clearly communicate the expected behaviour around the therapy dog, emphasising respect and gentleness.

Safety measures: Explain the training and certification of the therapy dog, as well as the presence of trained handlers to ensure safety.

FOLLOWUP & REFLECTION

To maximise the benefits of the therapy dog session, it's valuable to include a follow-up and reflection component. Here's what I recommend



- **Immediate debrief:** After the session, gather students to discuss their experiences and feelings about interacting with the therapy dog.
- **Journalling activity:** Encourage students to write or draw about their experience, focusing on how they felt before, during, and after the session.
- **Group discussion:** In a subsequent class, facilitate a discussion about what students learned from the experience and how it might apply to other areas of their lives.
- **Feedback collection:** Gather feedback from students, parents, and staff to improve future sessions and contact Canine Comprehension with the feedback.
- **Evidence Presentation:** Download your Pre and Post Evaluation Data Presentation, which will be emailed to the school contacts.
- **Ongoing support:** Make sure your future bookings are confirmed with Canine Comprehension for the entire school year.

THANK YOU

This guide aligns with our commitment to high standards of safety and welfare for therapy dogs, as addressed in our ethical treatment guidelines. It also supports our goal of providing personalised attention and adapting to diverse needs, as highlighted in our programme impact measurement approach.

Thank you for ensuring your student's Dog Assisted Learning sessions are as successful as possible.

By implementing these recommendations, we can create a positive, educational, and emotionally supportive experience that aligns with our mission to improve emotional regulation, confidence, and engagement among students through interactions with therapy dogs.



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