



THE MUTT-I-GREES® CURRICULUM: CALM, CONFIDENT AND CARING KIDS

* Teaches pro-social skills * Enhances confidence, empathy, and appreciation for diversity * Unique in its use of stories and activities about Mutt-i-grees® (shelter dogs) * Used by teachers and counselors in thousands of schools in over 40 states * Provides real-life experiences and community connections * Research findings indicate the Curriculum improves behavior and increases parent involvement and positive school climate

WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT? The Mutt-i-grees® Curriculum teaches social and emotional skills and is unique in its bridging of humane education and the emerging field of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). The notion underlying SEL is that being socially and emotionally competent leads to school success; just as we teach academic subjects, we can teach social and emotional skills.

In a series of easily implemented lessons, students learn critical skills that will help them in their interactions with people (and animals) in school, at home, and later on in the workplace. The lessons are presented in five units: **Achieving Awareness, Finding Feelings, Encouraging Empathy, Cultivating Cooperation,** and **Dealing with Decisions.** Activities and readings include feature lessons on dog behavior developed with renowned dog behavior expert Cesar Millan, from NatGeo WILD's *Dog Whisperer*.



HOW IS THE MUTT-I-GREES® CURRICULUM BEING USED? Each lesson is scripted to enable easy implementation and includes various different types of activities. Teachers may select from **discussions, role playing** and **hands-on activities**, or they may use the **readings** and **vocabulary words** highlighted in each lesson plan. Song and dance, art, and writing activities provide opportunities for creative expression and collaboration. Specific **activities for parents** ensure that families have opportunities to participate and follow up on what their children are experiencing in the classroom.



HOW DOES THE MUTT-I-GREES® CURRICULUM WORK? A unique aspect of the Mutt-i-grees® Curriculum is the focus on Mutt-i-grees®, or shelter dogs. However, **the Curriculum does not require the presence of a dog in the classroom**, although some schools involve a therapy dog for some lessons. Even the presence of a dog in the form of a puppet or toy or simply reading about dogs has been shown to be effective in commanding attention, improving cognitive abilities, and contributing to happiness.

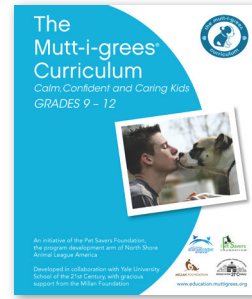
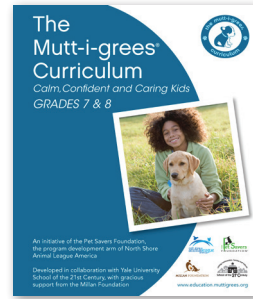


WAS THE MUTT-I-GREES® CURRICULUM EVALUATED? YES! We conducted outcome studies with more than 800 students in schools in rural and low-income urban communities. The studies randomly assigned some classrooms to receive the Mutt-i-grees® Curriculum and included student and educator surveys on school climate, as well as behavior, empathy, and parent involvement measures. Comparing classrooms using the Curriculum with non-Curriculum classrooms, we found:

- * Significantly higher understanding of shelter dogs and dog behavior among teachers and students in classrooms using the Curriculum;
- * Significantly higher levels of empathy and pro-social behaviors among students; and
- * Significantly higher levels of positive school climate (linked to bullying prevention) and parent involvement.



In addition, school principals reported reduced incidences of bullying and classroom conflict.



THE MUTT-I-GREES® CURRICULUM MAY BE IMPLEMENTED IN:

- * Mainstream classrooms
- * Service learning
- * Special education classrooms
- * After-school programs
- * Character education/Life skills programs
- * Health education
- * Preschool, childcare, and Head Start programs
- * Parent education programs
- * Title I Schools
- * In conjunction with bullying prevention programs
- * Mentoring programs

LESSONS IN THE MUTT-I-GREES® CURRICULUM INCLUDE:

- * Vocabulary/Key Words
- * Discussion
- * Focus on reflection
- * Hands-on activities
- * Role play
- * Song and dance
- * Opportunities for art, writing, and creative expression
- * Readings and resources
- * Family and community involvement activities

WHAT STUDENTS, PARENTS AND EDUCATORS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE MUTT-I-GREES® CURRICULUM:

"The Curriculum makes sense in a desensitizing world."
 – 10th grade male student participating in pilot test of Grades 9-12 Curriculum

"Mutt-i-grees® teaches us that we are special."
 – 1st grade student

"The Curriculum made me feel important."
 – 6th grade student

"I can attest to the fact that visits to my office involving bullying, for instance, have definitely dropped as our Mutt-i-grees® Curriculum took off."
 – Matthew Spade, Principal, Ponderosa Elementary School

"It enhances self- and social awareness and encourages students to develop a sense of responsibility... It meets our kids at whatever developmental level they're at and then takes them higher."
 – David Riddick, Principal, Fenton Avenue Charter School

"Bravo to whoever brought the Mutt-i-grees® Curriculum to our school. This sounds like an amazing approach to discuss such important and valuable topics. Promoting appreciation for their individual qualities and acceptance of individual diversity is so desperately needed, especially at this age. Being comfortable in one's own skin and being committed to your principles is difficult at any age."
 – Parent of a 5th grade student

"I liked how easy it was to illustrate the power of communication through body language, using dogs as examples. It was very easy for all the students to understand the objective of the lessons. I also liked the positive and hopeful message about handling adversity. The students were engaged and enjoyed the lessons."
 – School Psychologist

"I liked seeing how thinking about and relating to dogs brought out positive feelings in my students."
 – Teacher, grades 7 & 8

"The teachers that implemented the program this year had positive comments to share with our entire staff. One of the teachers commented that it was her favorite thing to teach during the week."
 – 5th grade teacher

"My students were very interested in talking about their experiences with dogs. I especially liked how easy it was to relate human body language with how dogs communicate non-verbally."
 – Teacher, grades 6-8

"By focusing on dogs and learning about and from dogs, children are learning about their own feelings and about other people's feelings. We are sowing the seeds for a more humane world and helping children."
 – 2nd grade teacher

"I especially liked the emphasis on accepting diversity and the idea of tolerance."
 – Teacher, grades 6-8



The Mutt-i-grees® Curriculum is a Pre-K to Grade 12 program available in the following binders: Pre-K–Grade 3, Grades 4–6, Grades 7 & 8, and Grades 9–12. To order, please visit <http://education.muttigrees.org/signup>. For more information about the Mutt-i-grees® Curriculum, please visit www.education.muttigrees.org. You may also contact us at info@muttigrees.org or (203) 432-9944.



Social and Emotional Learning

What is it?

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is an educational process that helps students to develop skills that will benefit them and others with whom they interact in everyday life. Skills such as managing and appropriately expressing emotions, working cooperatively, problem-solving, acting responsibly, and caring for others are all examples of Social Emotional Learning.

Why is it important?

Much of how people learn is done within the context of relationships with others. Beyond improving students' social interactions, skills developed through SEL help children to navigate the many difficult challenges that they face in today's society, assist in protecting them from the development of some mental health difficulties, and are critical to optimizing academic learning.

Social Emotional Learning and Academics

SEL has been linked to significant improvements in students' academic performance including:

- Improved standardized test scores¹
- Greater commitment and attachment to school²
- Better perspective-taking and problem-solving abilities leading to a deeper understanding of subject matter and the social environment, which are linked to resiliency³
- Increased opportunities for cooperative learning⁴
- Improved student engagement and attitudes toward school⁵
- Decreased behaviors that interfere with learning including violence and substance abuse⁶

Social Emotional Learning and Prevention

- A analysis of the results of over 200 studies of school-based prevention activities found interventions with a focus on social and emotional skills significantly decreased delinquency, alcohol and drug use, and conduct problems⁷
- Students who have developed a positive attachment to school, school staff, and peers are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviors and less likely to engage in high risk behaviors²

Benefit to School Staff

In schools that create an environment wherein social emotional competence is maximized, staff members report higher levels of teaching and work satisfaction.⁸ The whole school benefits when the school climate improves.

Helpful Links:

<http://www.casel.org/sel/academics.php>

<http://www.fenichel.com/resilience.shtml>

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Human-Dog Bond Research

What is it?

The bond between dogs and humans has been evidenced throughout history. Using domesticated animals as pets has been traced back to ancient times in Arabic, Chinese and Egyptian cultures.¹ Studies also indicate that local Native Americans domesticated dogs in North America over 30,000 years ago. The connection goes beyond a working alliance; there exists an emotional connection between dog and human. Historical records indicate that pets have been used for therapeutic purposes since the 9th century. Research indicates that positive and nurturing interactions lead to physiological, social and emotional benefits for both the pet and human.

What are the benefits of human-dog interactions?

The impact of pets on humans has been widely researched and identified to fall into three widespread categories of effect: physiological, social and emotional and cognitive.² When humans are engaged in a positive interaction with an animal, they evidence decreased heart rate and blood pressure, lower levels of stress and an overall state of relaxation and positive mood. Additional research suggests that being around animals and/or hearing animal stories helps to naturally teach empathy, improve self-esteem, self-confidence, respect and responsibility. These interactions also improve cooperation and social skills, while decreasing problem behaviors. Cognitively, positive relationships with animals increase academic skills, concentration, mental acuity, focus and balance.

How Does it Work?

The theory behind the positive effects of animal-human interactions:

- Presence of a dog invokes positive emotions, laughter, conversation and excitement³
- Dogs are able to identify and track human emotions⁴
- Humans are able to identify dog emotions⁵
- Humans are able to identify barking as communication from dogs⁶
- Dogs are able to understand human gestures⁷
- Dogs increase the expression of oxytocin (bonding hormone which lowers heart rate, blood pressure & stress) in humans⁸

Does a Vicarious Animal Presence Work?

Using puppets is effective⁹:

- Commands attention and interest
- Improves cognitive abilities
- Improves communication
- Enhances literacy skills
- Improves creative play
- Social and emotional functioning and expression

Helpful Links

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/nature/dogs-decoded.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/dogs/>

<http://www.vet.purdue.edu/chab/>

<http://www.americanhumane.org/interaction/>

http://www.avma.org/issues/human_animal_bond/default.asp

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



The Mutt-i-grees Curriculum was crafted so it can be easily adapted, depending on teachers' preferred instructional styles, available resources, and the temperament and developmental level of their students.

Is implementation time consuming?

Time is a precious commodity, especially in the classroom. Each lesson is designed to last approximately 30 minutes. Our goal is to provide a variety of options from which teachers can select; hence, there is no need to implement all of the activities presented in each lesson.

Lessons are implemented once or twice a week. With 20 core lessons included in the binders, the Curriculum may be implemented in two to four months. Teachers wishing to extend the experience may go over some core lessons or implement booster lessons.

In implementing the lessons, remember that the sequence presented is intentional and should be followed; implementing lessons at random is unlikely to have positive outcomes and may also result in loss of student interest. However, once all lessons are implemented, teachers may select to go over any of the lessons to reinforce a particular skill.

Is implementation expensive?

No. In addition to the low cost of the Curriculum binder, made possible with the generous support of our funders, the materials required are generally available in any classroom, and the books and additional resources can be found in local libraries. Trips to animal shelters, however, may incur a small cost per student.

Is training in social and emotional development necessary?

Lesson plans include some scripted prompts, as well as suggestions for discussion topics to help teachers who do not have specific training in social and emotional development. Although no training is required, teachers who feel they need some help and direction may call upon the school's guidance counselor or school psychologist. As indicated previously, in some schools the Mutt-i-grees® lead teacher or the guidance counselor or special education staff member goes into the classroom to teach the class, but this is not essential.

Do teachers need to know about dogs?

No, although the majority of teachers using the Curriculum love dogs, may have a dog, or are interested in finding out about dogs. The Reading and Resources section in the lesson plans provides books, videos, magazines, articles, and websites teachers may use to acquire more information about dogs. Teachers implementing the Curriculum have also invited dog trainers, animal shelter staff, and parents who own dogs to present in the classroom. Many teachers and administrators implementing the Curriculum have adopted and trained their own dogs as therapy dogs and bring them to school. If you don't have a dog or don't know much about dogs, it can help to begin with the first lesson. Students become more engaged in lessons when discussing dogs. This may seem difficult, but you can get lots of ideas from websites, readings, etc.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Some students are allergic to dogs. Can they participate?

Yes, since the presence of a dog is not required, all students may participate. When a dog is visiting the class or when the class visits an animal shelter, students who are allergic may be excused and referred to shelter websites and other online resources. Also, some dogs are hypoallergenic. Check with local shelters to see if they can provide hypoallergenic dogs to meet students if allergies are a problem.

Some students and teachers are afraid of dogs. How is this addressed in the Curriculum?

Fear of dogs can often be traced to a bad experience with a dog, which students may be helped to overcome, gradually. In a whole school approach to implementation of the Curriculum, teachers who expressed a fear of dogs were helped in the same way. In fact, some students and teachers have reported that using the Curriculum helped ease their fear of dogs within the first few months of implementation.

When should Mutt-i-grees® Club Activities be implemented?

The service learning and community outreach activities included in the upper grades may be implemented at any time. Some educators may decide to begin the experience with one or two of the activities and then begin the core lessons. However, there are no restrictions as to when the activities may be implemented.

Are lessons in the Mutt-i-grees® Curriculum matched to Common Core State Standards?

The Mutt-i-grees Curriculum can be used on its own or integrated within core academic subject areas. Each lesson includes segments that align with the Common Core State Standards, especially in the areas of Speaking and Listening, Language, Writing, and Reading.

Where can I get more information or ideas?

The Mutt-i-grees® website – www.education.muttigrees.org – and Facebook page are a continuous source of additional information and resources and also provide opportunities to ask for and share ideas.