



CREATING CALM, CONFIDENT, CARING KIDS



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Creating Calm, Confident, Caring Kids: The Mutt-i-grees® Curriculum

Children and animals have a natural affinity for one another.

Evidence shows that both derive many benefits from their interactions. The Mutt-i-grees Curriculum draws on this resiliency research, social and emotional learning and human-animal interaction to guide our program, which has two goals: enhancing children's resilience and social and emotional competence and promoting awareness of the desirability of shelter pets, referred to as Mutt-i-grees®. Our program reaches children beginning at a young age and provides opportunities for them to learn to care about themselves, other people, and animals.

The Mutt-i-grees Curriculum is a collaboration of North Shore Animal League America and Yale University's School of the 21st Century. The two organizations, one concerned with the welfare of companion animals and the other with the education and social and emotional development of children, have written a unique curriculum that supports the growth of calm, confident, and caring kids while creating a more humane future for all. The program is offered in schools, libraries, and other settings where children and families come together.



Awareness.

What Motivates Us

The Mutt-i-grees Curriculum addresses two sad realities:

- The large numbers of children who attend school each day, weighed down by negative experiences at school or at home.
- The plight of homeless pets awaiting adoption, millions of them euthanized each year in shelters that lack sufficient space.

Our Program Model

Every aspect of the Mutt-i-grees Curriculum reinforces the dual focus of our program. Children learn about shelter pets while also acquiring skills that support their ability to cope with stress, attain self-confidence and empathy, and learn to collaborate and make informed decisions. Each session includes an educational/developmental objective, with hands-on activities, books, and games focusing on shelter pets.



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How Mutt-i-grees Works

We offer the Mutt-i-grees Curriculum for Grades Pre-K through Grade 12. The lessons are organized into five themes that correspond to children's social and emotional skills:

- **Achieving Awareness**
- **Finding Feelings**
- **Encouraging Empathy**
- **Cultivating Cooperation**
- **Dealing with Decisions**

This sample packet contains a complete lesson that you can share with your students with step by step instructions. Each lesson plan follows a similar structure in which there is a clear objective and rationale for each session and includes materials, worksheets and hands-on activities. Plus, the digital version of the curriculum includes interactive materials such as videos, presentations and online activities.

Feelings. Empathy. Cooperation.



Effective for Special-Needs Kids

The Curriculum has proven extremely effective for special-needs students and those on the autism spectrum, providing a means for a more direct and meaningful connection to their environments. In several schools, educators provided alternative education students (with behavior and academic problems) with opportunities to work hands-on with shelter animals, feeding them, grooming them, and promoting their adoption. They report that the experience transforms students within several months; they return to regular classrooms and continue their education with classmates.

Praise from Teachers and Administrators

"I've always considered the Mutt-i-grees Curriculum an asset because it meets the social and emotional needs of the students. But when I saw the impact of actually incorporating dogs and puppies into the classroom, a light bulb went off."
Principal Terri Ahearn - Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Children already have a natural love and curiosity about animals and the curriculum draws upon that love to help transfer those feelings to other children."

Camy Bankemper, Program Coordinator - Cold Spring, KY

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ENCOURAGING EMPATHY

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Lesson Overview

LESSON TITLE	LESSON OBJECTIVE
3.1 Different Points of View	Students will enhance their understanding of empathy, the emotional states of others, and the importance of showing respect for others' perspectives and feelings.
3.2 Lend an Ear	Students will expand their repertoire of listening skills with a focus on taking another's perspective and communicating empathy and understanding. Students will also learn how to recognize dogs' body language and sounds to better understand what they are trying to communicate.
3.3 Smile and...	Students will analyze how their moods, feelings, and behaviors influence and impact others around them, including animals.
3.4 Yes, We Care!	Students will identify ways to help others and show that they care.

Booster Lessons

LESSON TITLE	LESSON OBJECTIVE
3.5 How Do They Feel?	Students will focus on observing others and reflect upon the ways other people (and animals) express themselves.
3.6 Little Things	Students will learn that through the use of simple words and gestures, empathy can become part of their everyday lives.
3.7 A Dog's Point of View	Students will further enhance their perspective-taking skills and learn how thinking about others and taking the perspective of an animal can lead to caring and compassion.

LESSON	3.1 Different Points of View
Objective	Students will enhance their understanding of empathy, the emotional states of others, and the importance of showing respect for others' perspectives and feelings.
Rationale	Learning about empathy will encourage students to become more caring and compassionate individuals and will also improve their interpersonal relationships. Empathy (the ability to understand others' perspectives) is an important skill in conflict resolution and helps students become tolerant and understanding. Although empathy is a social skill, it opens and broadens the mind, leading to enhanced cognitive skills.
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet access • Student computers, if available • Mutt-i-grees® Files
Key Words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Sympathy • Perspective / Point of view • Compassion • Innate • Nurture • Cultivate
Introduction	Anyone who has owned a dog can vouch for a dogs' deep sense of empathy , which seems to be innate ; they are tuned in to our feelings and somehow always know how we feel and when we need them. People are also born with the capacity for empathy, but it needs to be nurtured or cultivated in us through practice.
Discussion	<p>Though they can be closely related, there is a difference between sympathy and empathy. Empathy means the ability to identify with and understand somebody else's feelings or situation. It is sometimes referred to as the ability to take someone else's perspective or point of view. Sympathy is the expression of pity or sorrow for someone else's situation, letting them know you care, and having compassion. Some people explain it like this: Sympathy is feeling for someone else (for example, feeling sorry for), while empathy is feeling with someone else (actually understanding what they're going through, putting yourself in their shoes).</p> <p>Each of us is unique, and we may not react to or feel the same way about the same experience, so having empathy – being able to put ourselves in other people's shoes – is something we have to learn. How do we know how others may be feeling? Asking them is one way, but people may not want to share how they feel. What clues can you look for? Why do you think empathy is important? How can it help us become more caring individuals? Can you have sympathy for someone, but not empathize with them? What visual clues do you look for to determine how someone is feeling? (Observe body language; someone may be frowning or walking with their head down...) Can people feel differently about the same or similar situation? Why?</p>

Learning by Doing	<p><u>Pet stories.</u> Have any of you ever seen commercials on TV that pull at your heartstrings? Maybe some of these videos feature starving children or abandoned pets – how do they make you feel? Today we’re going to watch some videos of puppy mill rescues (see Readings and Resources). As you’re watching, think about how you’re feeling. I also want you to think about how the dogs in the video might be feeling. <i>Encourage discussion: Can students tell the difference between feeling sympathy for the dogs in the videos and empathizing with them? Were they moved to action? What do they think can be done? Encourage students to write or draw their reflections and share with the class. Discuss the various perspectives. Include these in their Mutt-i-grees® Files.</i></p>
Closure	<p>Today we learned about the difference between sympathy and empathy. We also talked about how important empathy is to helping us become more socially aware, caring, compassionate, and understanding individuals who are respectful of how others think and feel.</p>



Readings and Resources	<p>See <i>Snapshots</i> section of binder for more information on puppy mills Puppy Mill rescue videos: http://videos.animalleague.org/pages/pupmymillrescue <i>Dog Whisperer: The Rescue</i> by Nicholas Edwards <i>Everything for a Dog</i> by Ann M. Martin <i>Dogtown: Tales of Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Redemption</i> by Stefan Bechtel</p>
Advanced Activities	<p><u>Call to action.</u> There are many social issues to feel passionate about. Let’s brainstorm some... (Animal abuse, environmental concerns, recycling, hunger, poverty...) <i>Break students into groups and have them research social issues that concern them the most. Have each group present their findings to the class and discuss why they chose the issue they chose. Include the research in their Mutt-i-grees® Files.</i></p>

