



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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CULTIVATING COOPERATION & DEALING WITH DECISIONS

GRADES 9 – 12



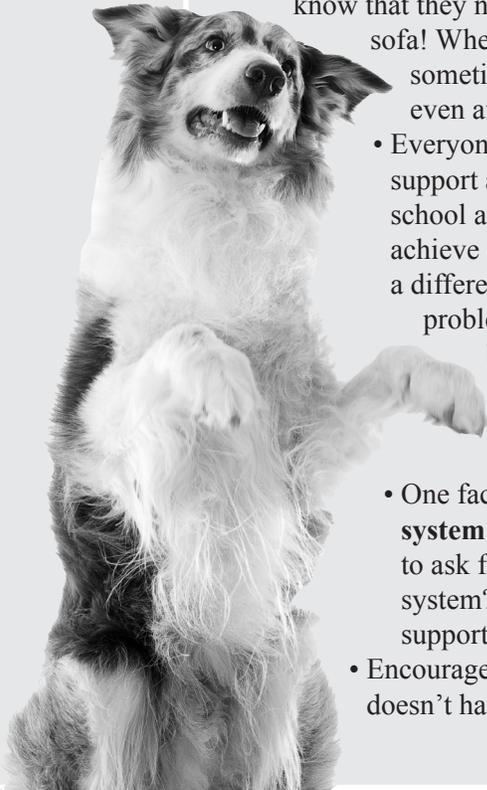
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LESSON OVERVIEW

Implement as many lessons as time allows, selecting them in the sequence they appear below.

LESSON TITLE	LESSON OBJECTIVE
4.1 Team Mutt-i-grees®	Students will explore the principles of and skills essential for collaboration and identify what we can learn from dogs about partnerships, teamwork, and seeking help in problem solving.
4.2 You've Got a Friend	Students will learn about the value of friendships and how social interactions with others can reinforce compassion, communication skills, and self-confidence.
4.3 Lean on Me	Students will learn about the importance of support systems and will identify who they can turn to for help in their community.
LESSON TITLE	LESSON OBJECTIVE
4.4 Wag Your Tail, Not Your Tongue	Students will review the impact one's choices, actions, and words can have on others and consider the intention behind what they say.
4.5 From Bully to Buddy	Students will learn how they can make conscious decisions that can contribute to creating a school climate that would nurture a change from bullies to buddies.
4.6 What's Next?	Students will identify further education and work opportunities and discuss strategies to help them achieve future goals.

LESSON	4.3 Lean on Me
Objective	Students will learn about the importance of support systems and will identify whom they can turn to for help in their community.
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Circle of Your Life</i> worksheet • <i>It Takes a Village</i> worksheet • Small box to decorate for <i>Help Me, Mutt-i-gree®!</i> help box
Key Words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support system • Guidance • Resource • Confidential • Anonymous • Collective wisdom
Overview	<p>Increasing students’ awareness of the impact others can have on their lives and of the people and organizations within their school and community that can offer support and assistance will provide them with confidence to ask for assistance, increase their knowledge regarding helpful resources, and bolster their coping skills and resiliency. The ability to ask for and give help when asked are positive traits associated with resiliency. For some students, relying on others is difficult and, at times, also embarrassing, so they may keep their problems to themselves. The message inherent in this lesson is that some problems are difficult and trying to resolve them may seem insurmountable, but we don’t have to tackle such problems alone. Working in collaboration with others, we can solve problems, break down barriers, and overcome obstacles and challenges.</p>
Discussion	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs ask us for help all the time. They’re never too embarrassed to let us know that they need to go outside or that their ball is stuck behind the sofa! Whereas dogs do not hesitate to ask for our help, people sometimes feel awkward, embarrassed, too proud, and perhaps even afraid to ask for help – why? • Everyone benefits from having someone they can count on for support and guidance. Knowing that there are people in our school and community who can help us learn, improve and achieve our goals, and feel better is reassuring and can make a difference in our lives. Even if you have a deeply personal problem, there are people who can help who are bound by rules that require them to keep your information confidential. These people may not know you need help, however, so you need to take the first step; You have to ask. • One factor that helps build resiliency is having a support system: a person or people to count on. Another is the ability to ask for, as well as give, help. Who makes up your support system? Who can you count on? Could a dog be part of your support system? How do dogs help? • Encourage class discussion: What might be the outcome if a person doesn’t have a support system to turn to when they need help?

LEARNING BY DOING:

Choose one or more of the activities below. Additional activities can be found online:
<http://education.muttigrees.org/mutt-i-grees-curriculum-strategies-activities>

Write and
Reflect



Circle of your life. Think about the various relationships you have with the different people in your life (friends, boyfriend/girlfriend, parents, coaches, tutors, etc.). The ways in which you interact with these people is specific to their roles. Make a list of the five most influential people (and animals) in your life and place them in the appropriate circles on the *Circle of Your Life* worksheet. Encourage students to reflect on who makes up their inner circle and who makes up the outer circles and why. Do people move in and out of different circles at different times? Is your pet a part of your inner circle?

Apply

It takes a village. There are both risk factors (for example, stress) and protective factors associated with resiliency. Knowing that one needs help and being able to ask for help is a protective factor that can lead to resilience, or the ability to bounce back from adversity. Another protective factor is having a support system – people and organizations that can help. There is a saying: “It takes a village (community) to raise a child.” What community organizations shaped your upbringing? Who is there to help? Using the *It Takes a Village* worksheet, ask students to design a community **resource** map identifying community organizations that are there to help or that may have played an integral role in their lives. Share the resource map on the school website or in the school newspaper.

Create

Help Me, Mutt-i-gree®! There are many different reasons and ways to ask for help; sometimes you can even do it **anonymously**. Have students create and decorate a Help Me, Mutt-i-gree® Help Box and place in the classroom. Encourage students to ask for help with any problems they may have by writing a question or issue on a slip of paper and placing it in the box. Assure students that no names will be used and encourage them to place a slip of paper in the box whenever they’re having an issue that they can’t solve on their own. Some students may wish to ask questions about issues with which other students are struggling. Read the slips of paper aloud occasionally and ask the class to use their **collective wisdom** to provide suggestions for ways to help. Another option: Have students create a support group or advice column for the school newspaper or website. Encourage other students to ask anonymous questions and have a team of students respond. This activity can be the basis of a mentoring project for high school students to help younger students identify problems, ask for help, and receive advice through the voice or pen of Mutt-i-grees®. Students may team up with a teacher or school counselor to respond to the problems.

Closure

Today we identified the people in our family, school, and community who are there to support and help us. We also discussed the benefits of having a support system.

RECOMMENDED
RESOURCES

Until Tuesday: A Wounded Warrior and the Golden Retriever Who Saved Him
by Luis Carlos Montalván and Bret Witter

*A Dog Named Boo: How One Dog and One Woman Rescued Each Other -
and the Lives They Transformed Along the Way* by Lisa J. Edwards

To the Rescue: Found Dogs with a Mission by Elise Lufkin and Diana Walker

Saved: Rescued Animals and the Lives They Transform
by Karin Winegar and Judy Olausen

[Help Me, Mr. Mutt-i-gree®!](#)

Help Me, Mr. Mutt! Expert Answers for Dogs with People Problems
by Janet Stevens and Susan Stevens Crummel



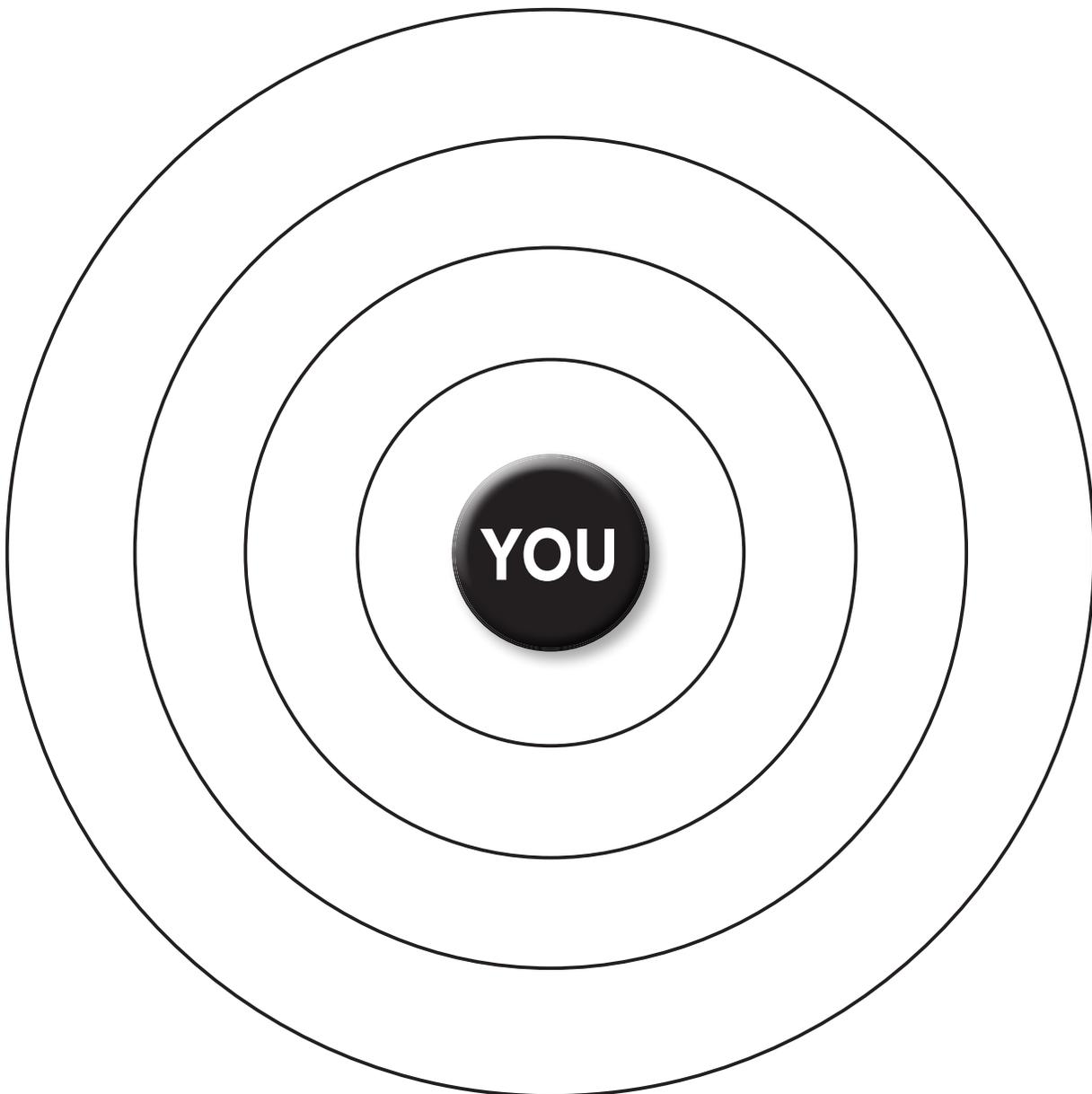
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Circle of Your Life

Make a list of the five most influential people or animals in your life and place them in the appropriate circles. Who makes up your inner circle? Who makes up your outer circle? Why? Do people move in and out of different circles at different times? Is your pet a part of your inner circle?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



It Takes a Village

Use the chart below to identify and list local organizations in your community that can help in times of need. Can you think of any other categories? If so, add to this chart.



HEALTH

MENTAL HEALTH

RELATIONSHIPS

ADDICTION

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

TEEN PREGNANCY

ABUSE

CAREER

OTHER
