

Classroom ‘doggie dates’ reduce stress in primary school kids

Kamah! Cogdon, June 26, 2022 2:30PM Kids News

HEALTH

Reading level: **Green**

Dogs in the classroom lower stress in primary school students, new research has found.

The study by UK researchers found spending 20 minutes with a dog twice a week was better at reducing stress in students than classroom relaxation sessions like meditation.

And the benefits of these “doggie dates” were similar for children in both mainstream* and special needs schools.

Stress is known to negatively affect a child’s learning, behaviour, health and wellbeing. This has led schools to try a number of ways to reduce stress, including yoga, mindfulness, meditation, physical activity and having animals in classrooms.

The researchers from the University of Lincoln measured students’ stress levels by tracking the level of the stress hormone cortisol in their saliva.

They studied 105 eight- and nine-year-olds in four mainstream schools as well as 44 children of a similar age in seven special needs schools in the UK.

The children were randomly* split into three groups: a group that spent time with a dog; a group that spent time doing relaxation sessions; and a “control” group that did neither of these things.

Students in the dog group spent 20 minutes with a trained dog and handler twice a week for four weeks. The relaxation group spent the same amount of time doing exercises like meditation.

University of Lincoln researcher Kerstin Meints said the children in the dog group had “significantly lower” cortisol levels, while those in the relaxation and control groups recorded an increase in cortisol levels over the school term.

The study, which was published in the Plos One journal, also found stress was lowest in the children in the dog group immediately after their sessions with the pooches.

“Dog-assisted interventions* can lead to lower stress levels in schoolchildren with and without special educational needs,” the researchers found.

They said more research was needed to discover what was the ideal amount of time and contact with dogs for the best effect on children’s stress levels.

What best describes how you feel, or would feel, about having a dog at school?

Happy

Calm

Excited

Compassionate

Loved

Distracted

Cast your vote

GLOSSARY

- **mainstream:** used by most people
- **randomly:** in a way that is done without a system or plan
- **interventions:** actions taken to improve a problem

EXTRA READING

Top dog Elmo is in full flight(<https://www.kidsnews.com.au/animals/top-dog-elmo-is-in-full-flight-helping-travellers-at-adelaide-airport/news-story/05feb2ec01829cdb4d1a1ee052ce1d54>).

Top award for a dog named Zero(<https://www.kidsnews.com.au/animals/courtroom-canine-wins-excellence-award/news-story/c7ab939f737a2a0dcffd9d7a757dff50>).

Australia's biggest dog helping kids read(<https://www.kidsnews.com.au/animals/australias-biggest-dog-a-gentle-giant-helping-schoolchildren-and-the-elderly/news-story/b8c5039297193e6e52641102d0a62a9f>).

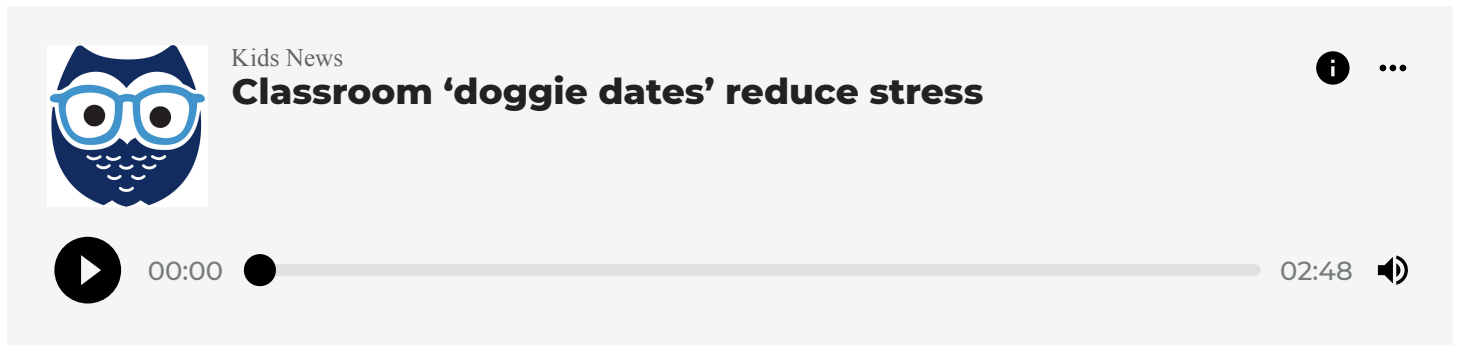
Dogs can be young readers' best friend(<https://www.kidsnews.com.au/animals/learning-to-read-can-be-much-more-fun-with-the-help-of-a-dog/news-story/f65e183620748958eb03829978408a1b>).

QUICK QUIZ

1. How long did the students in the dog group spend with a dog and handler?
2. What did students in the relaxation group do?

3. How did the researchers measure the students' stress levels?
4. Which UK university conducted this research?
5. How many students were part of the study?

LISTEN TO THIS STORY



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Scientific questioning

Scientific knowledge is revised, refined and extended as new evidence arises. The last sentence of this news story indicates that the researchers already have plans to refine what they have found out. But how else could this knowledge be questioned or built upon?

With a partner, brainstorm all of the things you wonder and all of the questions you have about this research. Together decide upon one specific question that you would want to answer next, to revise, refine or extend your scientific knowledge, if you were part of the research team.

Time: allow 15 minutes to complete this activity

Curriculum Links: English; Science

2. Extension

Write a plan for how the next stage of research could be conducted, that would answer the question you decided on above.

Time: allow 15 minutes to complete this activity

Curriculum Links: English; Science

VCOP ACTIVITY

Opener up-level it

Make a list of all the openers in the article. Pick three that repeat and see if you can replace them with another word, or shuffle the order of the sentence to bring a new opener to the front.

Don't forget to re-read the sentence to make sure it still makes sense, and that it actually sounds better.