



## Canine Comprehension - Information for Parents

Thank you for enrolling your child in the Canine Comprehension School Group Program. Supporting your child's involvement in this program is a great first step to giving them an opportunity to explore their emotional expression and to connect positively with their learning environment.

Some children have a hard time at school and can struggle with their learning and friendships as a result. Through weekly attendance at our Group Program, your child may now have more positive feelings about themselves and school. The presence of a dog can make awkward or tough conversations a little easier because the focus is not on the students. As a result, your child may feel less anxious, more in control of their emotions, or have made some new friends.

### Topics explored

- Motivation - e.g., what motivates us; what is internal vs. external motivation; what motivates the dogs; how can we use motivation and incentives to promote positive thinking and behaviour.
- Feelings - e.g., what they are; what we call them; how we express them; the benefits of sharing with others; strategies for managing strong ones.
- Thoughts - e.g., what is positive vs. negative thinking; how does our thinking affect the way we feel and behave; what control we have over our thinking.
- Communication - e.g., how we respect others when they are talking; effective ways of getting the attention of others; strategies for boosting confidence when speaking; actively practicing through teaching commands and tricks to the dog.
- Mindfulness - e.g., following a guided meditation; colouring; journalling or writing; drawing.

### What this means

Students have been given a greater awareness about their feelings and how to name them. They have been encouraged to communicate these feelings to people in their life through productive means (such as talking and sharing) rather than dysfunctional means (acting out, yelling, swearing or physically hurting others or property). They have taken time to identify strategies that can help when they are feeling strong or negative feelings. They may have even started practicing these strategies in between our weekly sessions together.

### What you might notice

- Your child starts to talk more about their feelings and has words to name them.
- Your child shares detail about the dog and the things they have taught the dog to do. This is likely to be accompanied by excitement but they could also express frustration that they aren't achieving what they had hoped to.
- Your child explains that they need time or space from you. This could be a coping strategy they are trying to put into place to manage strong feelings in a positive way.
- Your child's mood hasn't really improved overall, perhaps just on the days of the Group Program.

### What's helpful for you to know:

We talked a lot with students about strategies and techniques they can use to reduce negative feelings and increase positive ones. It can be helpful for children and young people to have a few support people in their life

who know what these strategies and techniques are. As such, you might like to ask your child about one or two of them so that when they encounter a challenge, you can suggest a tool to help.

Anxiety is a very real concern for children and young people and it is alarmingly common. They will feel more supported to deal with their strong feelings if the people around them validate their experiences and show understanding. Refrain from saying “Don’t worry about it” or “Brush it off” and instead demonstrate support through statements such as, “That must be hard” or “Tell me more about that”, even if you can’t truly understand what they’re going through.

### What if you aren’t sure how to respond?

- Be curious and inquisitive. Ask questions and show a genuine interest.
- Take the time to listen. You don’t have to have all the answers but a listening ear can go a long way.
- Check-in with your child regularly to let them know that you care and haven’t forgotten about what they shared or how they are feeling.
- If you would like to explore more professional supports, give your child choice rather than forcing them into something they don’t want to do.
- Explore some of the websites specifically targeted to supporting parents with their child’s mental health concerns, detailed below.

An eight-week program, such as the one your child has just participated in, may not be “enough” for their support needs. If you remain concerned about your child’s wellbeing or if they have expressed that they feel sad, worried, disconnected, lonely or worthless, there are additional supports available to them and to you. Do not feel bad or disappointed if your child wants to speak to someone other than you about how they are feeling. Sometimes they might just want to speak to a person who doesn’t know them personally or who isn’t subjectively involved in their situation.

### Support suggestions

Call <b>Parentline</b> and talk to an experienced counsellor, 7 days per week, 8am to midnight.	13 22 89	Parents of children aged 0-18 years
Invite your child to connect with <b>Kids Helpline</b> and speak confidentially to a counsellor, 7 days per week, 8am to midnight. <b>Kids Helpline</b> also has some great tip sheets and information for parents.	Call 1800 55 1800 Webchat via <a href="http://www.kidshelpline.com.au">www.kidshelpline.com.au</a>	Children and young people aged 5-25 years
Speak to your child’s <b>school</b> about your concerns and devise a strategy for responding together.	Meet with someone from the Leadership Team or the nominated Welfare Personnel	Children and young people attending school
Engage in some free parenting coaching through <b>ReachOut.com</b> . You can access up to four sessions to	<a href="https://parents.au.reachout.com/">https://parents.au.reachout.com/</a>	Parents of young people aged 12-18 years

explore and enhance the relationship you have with your teen.		
Reach out to <b>headspace</b> . They have centres all over Melbourne with drop-in services as well as an online and telephone service. This support is accessible for both young people and their family and friends.	<a href="https://eheadspace.org.au">https://eheadspace.org.au</a> 1800 650 890	Young people aged 12-25 years
Make a call to <b>Child FIRST</b> , a voluntary and preventative service that supports families to link into the services they need. You can ring up and self-refer for any number of reasons (such as family conflict or pressures due to concerns of mental health, substance use, disability or bereavement).	Banyule, Darebin, Whittlesea and Yarra: 9450 0955  Moreland 1300 786 433	Parents of children and young people aged 0-17 years
You or your child can call <b>Lifeline</b> 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in the event of a mental health crisis or if experiencing suicidal thoughts.	13 11 14	People of all ages
<b>Local council Youth Services</b> offer generalist support to young people aged 12-25 in areas such as art, music, sport, education and training, drama and politics. Through group programs and events, young people are encouraged to connect with others and the things they care about, which promotes positive mental health. Encourage your child to visit the website for the youth centre in their local government area for details.	<u><b>Banyule Youth Centre:</b></u> 44 Turnham Avenue, Rosanna  <u><b>Darebin Youth Centre:</b></u> Northland Shopping Centre  <u><b>Whittlesea (EDGE):</b></u> Westfield Plenty Valley  <u><b>Yarra Youth Centre:</b></u> 156 Napier Street, Fitzroy  <u><b>Moreland Youth Space:</b></u> 4-8 Gaffney Street, Coburg North.	Young people aged 12-25 years