



THE GOOD DOG FOUNDATION
dogs helping humans heal

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New Study Demonstrates Dogs Help Children Recover from Stress

**Study Conducted by Yale University
Included Trained Therapy Dogs from The Good Dog Foundation**

New York, NY, November 27, 2018 – A new study recently published in the *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology* found that children experiencing stress who then interact with therapy dogs benefit from improved mood and reduced anxiety. Titled, “The Influence of Interactions with Dogs on Affect, Anxiety, and Arousal in Children,” researchers from Yale University reported that unstructured interactions with a therapy dog boosted children’s positive emotions following a moderate stressor compared with children who received a soothing object (a soft blanket) or those who simply waited a short time without intervention. Children who interacted with a dog also had reduced anxiety compared with those who waited.

“What’s exciting is that the study gets us closer to answering the question of whether there is something special about dogs in terms of their ability to help children recover from stress. They are doing something better than another common coping strategy – tactile stimulation from a soothing object – and that merits additional research so we can build effective and efficient interventions,” said lead study author Molly K. Crossman, a Ph.D. candidate from the Department of Psychology at Yale University.

The Good Dog Foundation helped to establish study protocols that elucidated the treatment effects of dogs while prioritizing both human and dog safety and welfare. The organization also provided certified therapy teams to participate in the study.

“We are grateful to The Good Dog Foundation for their role in helping to establish the dog selection and care protocols, and for connecting us with a number of exceptional therapy dog teams, who were essential to the project’s success,” Crossman added.

Human-dog therapy teams are widely available in healthcare and educational settings across the United States. The study states that “interactions with animals represent a promising way to reduce the burden of childhood mental illness on a large scale,” and, while more research is needed, their presence is increasingly supported by a growing body of science on the efficacy of animal-assisted interactions. The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) funded the study to better understand the emotional and physiological effects on children brought about by canine members of therapy dog teams. Studies have previously evaluated the effects of dogs and handlers together, while this study examined the impact that a dog alone might have.

“The Yale team effectively spotlighted two important findings: that dogs, all by themselves, can improve children’s mood and ability to cope with anxiety, and that they can do so as a therapeutic intervention for stress recovery,” says HABRI Executive Director, Steven Feldman.

Isolating the Dog Effect

This study included pre-teen children (ages 10-13) because they are particularly susceptible to barriers to treatment such as perceived stigma, discomfort talking about mental health problems, and wanting to cope independently, plus therapy dogs are already in widespread use for children of this age group. The children

were randomized into three groups: those who played with a dog, those placed in a tactile-stimulation control group with a soft blanket, and those in a waiting control group.

Among the dogs (four male, four female) that contributed to data collection, all were certified as therapy dogs by The Good Dog Foundation or another therapy dog organization (e.g., Pet Partners), or had successfully completed an equivalent behavioral evaluation. In advance of exposure to children, all dogs were familiarized with the laboratory setting and screened for appropriateness for the study procedures.

To protect the safety and well-being of the human and canine participants during the 15-minute interventions, an experimenter supervised all interactions from the corner of the room. The dogs' own handlers additionally observed from behind a two-way mirror. Children's physiological stress was tested via their salivary cortisol levels in all study arms.

Good Dog Foundation Board Director, Heidi Greene, and her dog, Deuce, who participated in the Yale study, have been working together as a certified therapy team for over a decade. "We mostly volunteer at psychiatric facilities and with kids in reading programs," says Ms. Greene. "We've witnessed how a brief visit and cuddle from Deuce can bring needed comfort. But, working with the study group at Yale to help codify how dogs help humans heal was thrilling, a particular privilege. As an organization, The Good Dog Foundation is committed to initiating and participating in research with esteemed academic partners like Yale. It's part of our mission to broaden the evidence base for and our understanding of human animal interaction."

Study Details

Participants in the three study arms did not differ in terms of age, race/ethnicity, sex, experience with dogs or other measures that explore children's feelings and behavior toward companion animals. Following exposure to a stressful task, children who interacted with a dog showed significantly higher levels of positive affect than participants who received tactile stimulation without any interaction (a mean difference of 2.35 points, 95% CI [0.66, 4.03], $p = .007$, $d = 0.79$) or waited (a mean difference of 1.92 points, 95% CI [0.24, 3.60], $p = .025$, $d = 0.65$).

In addition, children who played with a dog had significantly lower anxiety scores than participants in the waiting control condition (a mean difference of 3.63 points, 95% CI [1.25, 6.01], $p = .003$, $d = 0.86$). There was no statistical difference detected between those in the tactile-stimulation control condition ($p = .065$, 95% CI [-0.14, 4.65], $d = 0.53$) and those who interacted with the dogs. Participants who interacted with the dogs did not differ significantly from other participants in salivary cortisol, an indicator of physiological stress.

To access the study findings published in the *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, copy and paste the following link into your browser: <https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/cnywaDrT26B2VjnbarWd/full>

For more information about Animal Assisted Intervention or becoming a therapy dog team, visit: www.thegooddogfoundation.org.

Experts available for interview:

- Molly K. Crossman, Study Principal Investigator and Co-Director, Yale Innovative Interactions Lab, Yale University; and Dr. Alan E. Kazdin, former Director, Yale Innovative Interactions Lab, and study co-author
- Rachel McPherson, Founder and President, The Good Dog Foundation; and Bruce Fagin, Executive Vice President, The Good Dog Foundation
- Steven Feldman, Executive Director, Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI)

The Good Dog Foundation, founded in 1998 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, is a globally recognized leader in Animal-Assisted Intervention. Its mission is to ease human suffering and promote healing among children and adults experiencing trauma from disease, disability, disaster, aging and other stressful conditions. To achieve its mission, Good Dog offers six hours of in-class training for hundreds of prospective volunteer teams (dog and handler) annually. The foundation's quality control, team placement, certification, and supervision protocols are widely recognized as setting the bar for best practices in the industry. This past year, Good Dog trained, certified and deployed nearly 1,000 therapy dog teams, carefully matching them with some 300 partner-facilities (hospitals, schools, nursing homes, etc.) in the Greater New York Metro area (including parts of New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts). The teams work free-of-charge and help over a hundred thousand people annually recover from stress and trauma as well as contribute to learning (reading and other educational programs). In collaboration with esteemed institutions such as Yale University, Pace University, University of Pennsylvania, and others, Good Dog initiates and participates in scientific studies to assess the efficacy of Animal-Assisted Intervention. A landmark study in 2015 with Mount Sinai Beth Israel in New York City was the first to show the benefits of Animal-Assisted Therapy with cancer patients undergoing radiation and chemotherapy. Good Dog also has an elite corps of volunteer therapy dog teams trained and certified in Crisis Response in the event of national disasters. For more information visit: <http://thegooddogfoundation.org/>

The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) is a not-for-profit organization that maintains the world's largest online library of human-animal bond research and information; funds innovative research projects to scientifically document the health benefits of companion animals; and informs the public about human-animal bond research and the beneficial role of companion animals in society. For more information about the HABRI Foundation, please visit www.habri.org.

Yale Innovative Interactions Lab is a research group directed by Alan Kazdin, PhD and co-directed by Molly K. Crossman, within the Department of Psychology, Yale University. The lab is dedicated to learning more about how children and youth interact with animals and robots to improve their own wellbeing and cope with the challenges of daily life.

Canine Cognition Center at Yale The Canine Cognition Center at Yale is a research facility in the [Psychology Department](#) at [Yale University](#). The Center is directed by Laurie Santos, PhD, and studies how dogs think about the world. The center is devoted to learning more about canine psychology—how dogs perceive their environment, solve problems, and make decisions. These findings teach us how the dog mind works, which can help us to better develop programs to improve how we train and work with our canine friends.

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