



Animal assisted special lesson ASL MANUAL



With Dogs for a Smile Foundation 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	3
GROUPING BY TARGET GROUPS	11
THE PRESCHOOL YEARS.....	11
PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS – LOWER GRADES (AGES 7–10).....	31
PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS – UPPER GRADES (AGES ~11–14).....	38
ATYPICAL CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL	43
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS	50
LIFE IN EVERYDAY LIFE WITH AN FACILITY DOG	58
GENERAL INFORMATION	60
IMPORTANT GROUND RULES TO FOLLOW	62
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	63
EVALUATION, COMMENTS	64
ATTACHMENT:	64
LESSON PLANS:	64

Foreword

This handbook is intended as a starting point for anyone interested in **dog-assisted activities** – whether as a teacher or as a handler. Our aim is to give a general idea of the characteristics of children in different age groups, how to organize sessions for a given group, which types of activities are worthwhile, and which are not. To provide this guidance, we draw on the many years of experience of the trainers and handlers of the **With Dogs for a Smile Foundation**, who are eager to share their knowledge with anyone open to learning alternative methods, who is flexible, determined, and receptive to a new approach.

To ensure we start from the same baseline, let us first review *why dogs have become the main characters of animal-assisted sessions* and why this alternative method has gained such popularity. Dogs are the only species in the world that view the human family as their natural environment and do not distinguish between humans and their canine companions. Apart from humans, dogs are unique in that they can form bonds with *non-breed mates*, which creates an **intrinsic motivation** in the dog to always meet its owner's expectations in all circumstances.

Dogs possess a refined sense of perception that enables them to notice every small movement and involuntary change in their owner and respond in a learned way. Dogs are able to interpret human gestures and, thanks to quick and precise learning processes, they learn relatively fast what to do in various situations. These basic skills allow the dog to be a human's partner in serious tasks such as development, reassurance, and helping the underprivileged.

The recognition of the usefulness of animal therapies dates back to **1919**. In Washington, a variety of pets were incorporated into a mental health program for patients at St. Elizabeths Hospital, with the help of expert health workers. Even then, the healing effects of working with animals were observed. Later, patients of the same hospital – wounded soldiers with mental health problems – were treated on a farm, where they were entrusted with caring for the animals living there. The daily care tasks, the animals' proximity, and the unconditional love from the animals clearly had a positive effect on the soldiers' psyche.

The real breakthrough came in **1968** in the United States, by a fortunate coincidence discovered by psychologist **Boris M. Levinson**. The story goes that Dr. Levinson didn't have time to take his dog home after a walk, so he brought the dog into a therapy session with a shy, anxious, non-speaking child. The child, who had been reluctant to talk, began to speak to the dog – initiating communication. At that moment Levinson realized that his four-legged pet served as a *bridge* in the therapy session: the presence of the dog dissolved the child's inhibitions, eased anxiety, and opened the child up to the world. Thanks to that initial success, Levinson is credited as the pioneer of animal-assisted therapy.

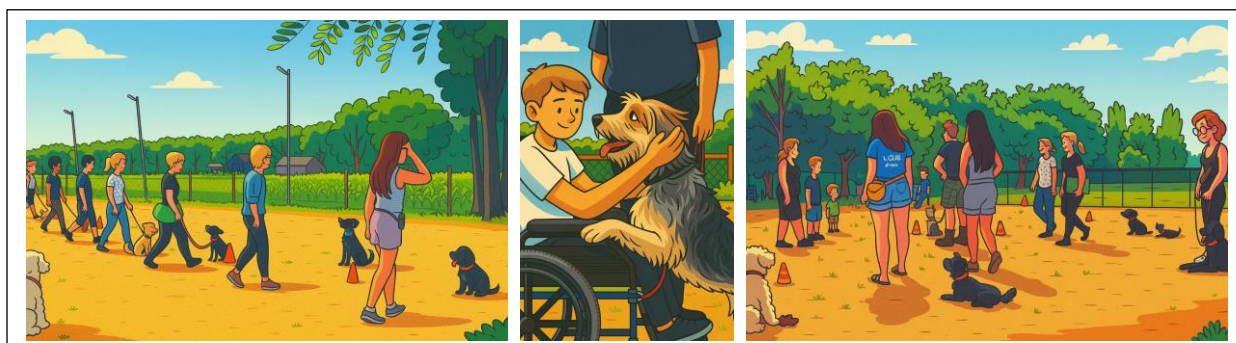
Since then, numerous articles and studies have demonstrated the method's effectiveness and usefulness, and a solid methodological framework has been developed for various types of dog-assisted sessions. In Hungary, trained assistance dogs used in developmental work are officially

called “**therapy dogs**” (as defined under Section 2 on AAT, page 3), while dogs trained to international standards are called “**facility dogs.**” Organizations run by assistance-dog trainers prepare both the dog and its owner for these tasks. Basic training can take 1–2 years.

Turning a pet or even a consciously selected dog into a facility dog requires very serious preparation, training, and lifelong learning. It’s not enough for a dog to be suitable for this job; its handler (who is also the owner) must also meet demanding requirements. During training, the owner learns to control the dog in a dog school setting—essential for this line of work. All volunteers wishing to join our foundation must attend a theoretical training course, which provides a comprehensive overview of therapeutic development work and the additional potential of our dogs. It is not enough to manage a well-behaved dog in a school setting; it is also essential to have a solid owner-dog relationship in urban and unfamiliar environments.

Once a team (dog and handler) has performed well in these three areas (obedience school, theoretical knowledge, public settings), they are allowed to begin working in a community as a service-dog team. In all cases, newcomers first join an “**established**” **group** where another experienced dog is already working and the children are accustomed to a dog’s presence. Thus, newly arrived teams have the opportunity—under controlled conditions and with expert assistance from the Regional Lead Trainer—to progress to becoming an official, certified **facility dog–handler team**.

However, meeting the initial expectations is not the end of the journey. These well-trained dogs can enter many places with their handlers, so it’s essential to continuously check their health. A dog’s health must be reviewed annually, with a veterinarian’s official stamped certificate as proof.



Dogs and handlers who meet all the above criteria can work effectively in the following areas:

- **AAI** – *Animal Assisted Intervention*, a noun/acronym formed from the term “animal-assisted intervention.”

Types of AAI:

- AAA – animal assisted activity
- AAT – animal assisted therapy
- AAE – animal assisted education

These areas are related and share some elements, but there are important differences in how the activities are planned and carried out.

Types of AAI (Animal-Assisted Interventions)

1. Animal Assisted Activity (AAA)

*Animal-assisted activity focuses on improving the quality of life of the people involved in the sessions, with **general goals** and no formal progress monitoring. The program is usually spontaneous – essentially a **visitation program**. The dog is present, but no specific development therapy takes place. There is no targeted developmental goal or specific target group; the dog’s presence is used “just” for its beneficial effects. For example, stroking the dog’s silky fur, experiencing its selfless love, and having the animals visit regularly all mean a lot to, say, elderly people. In addition, the participants can chat with the handlers, which in itself is a form of mental health support. Conversations don’t have to be only about the dog but can be prompted by the dog’s presence.*

General objectives of AAA:

- Reducing the isolation of some participants.
- Building a positive relationship between the dog and the session participants.
- Increasing motivation to participate in tasks by involving the dog.
- Improving the ability to interact with dogs and people (both peers and strangers) – i.e., developing social skills.
- Understanding dog behavior and comparing it to human behavior.
- Reducing participants’ fears and aversions toward animals.
- Enhancing emotional sensitivity and empathy, and attunement to others’ changing emotions.
- Improving communication.
- Reducing stress, whether in the presence of the animal or from other sources.

In AAA sessions, we strive to ensure the time spent together is useful and enjoyable for everyone. We want participants to experience as much success as possible through solving tasks and enjoying play. It is important that they learn about the dog’s behavior, lifestyle, and care while spending time with the dog.

2. Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT)

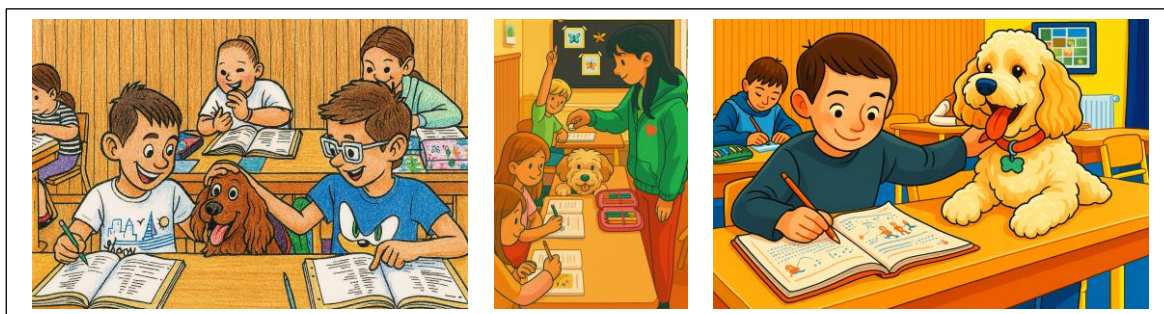
Animal-assisted therapy involves sessions that are organized according to **pre-established goals** and where progress is monitored. This is a specific therapy for rehabilitation and development in which the **target group**, the **area to be developed**, the **development goal**, and the **therapeutic framework** are defined in advance. The dog is present as a **motivational partner** and a communication catalyst. The characteristics and abilities of the target group, as well as the logistical possibilities offered by the institution, are also determining factors in planning these sessions.

Objectives of AAT (non-exhaustive list):

- Prevention, cure (correction), skills development, education, and improved quality of life.
- Reducing and compensating for disadvantages resulting from disabilities.
- Developing mental functions (perception, cognition, memory, attention, thinking).
- Developing motor functions: coordination of gross motor skills and fine motor skills; correcting incorrect movements and establishing proper movement patterns; reducing postural errors; improving balance and rhythm.
- Positively influencing emotional and volitional life, behavior, conduct, and action.
- Educating for independence.
- Age-appropriate discipline, perseverance, purposefulness, sense of responsibility, and duty.

3. Animal Assisted Education (AAE)

In **animal-assisted education**, our four-legged friends are regularly included in both preschool and school lessons, providing children an experiential way of learning. The dog assists in teaching about topics such as environmental protection, animal welfare, responsible pet ownership, and the work of assistance dogs, while simultaneously helping children learn to accept “diversity.” Regular “dog classes” also offer an opportunity to support children with special needs: through the method of unconditional acceptance, typically developing children practice tolerance, leadership, and non-discriminatory love towards the dog and, by extension, each other. Learning alongside a dog and playing together to develop skills helps shape the classroom community and strengthen integration.



The main strength of dog-assisted sessions:

“The role of play, which is important in human nature, must be mobilised for the sake of education. Education must be closely related to what children like to do, what they are curious about.” – Hall, 1881

The motivating power of dog therapy:

- **Dogs:** Most children are naturally drawn to animals. They want to touch them, direct them, get to know them. By properly and consciously guiding this curiosity, the dog helps children carry out assigned tasks.
- **Play:** Dog sessions are playful, and play is a source of joy.
- **Movement:** The need for movement is part of the need for stimuli; dog sessions incorporate physical activity.
- **Knowledge:** Children have prior knowledge about dogs, so they can easily connect new information to their existing internal understandings. We can keep adding new elements to what they already know.
- **Tasks:** We give children tasks at an intermediate level, adapted to their abilities, so that accomplishing the task itself provides a sense of achievement.

The spontaneous effects of working with a dog:

- Increasing knowledge.
- Relieving stress.
- Finding a friend.
- Developing empathy.
- A sense of security.
- Practicing a leadership role.

The dog’s participation in sessions:

The dog’s biggest role is **motivation** – we encourage the children to complete tasks through the dog’s presence.

- The dog and the child take part in the sessions either by solving tasks together or separately.
- With the dog, the child is “just” playing while actually doing tasks similar to those in the classroom, so the task situation is not stressful.
- The dog’s presence not only motivates the child but also alleviates the anxiety that a task situation might cause – anxiety itself can hinder good performance.
- Importantly, **there are no losers when working with the dog.** During lessons, we work with the dog, and if a child doesn’t “win” a particular game or task, the dog will go sit or lie with that child and give affection. In that way, every child gets a positive experience.
- A dog’s participation can be passive or active.

Types of tasks in dog-assisted sessions:

Care-related tasks:

- We give children the opportunity to care for the dog during sessions (brushing, providing water and food, etc.).

Skill-building exercises:

- We develop various areas (visual perception, memory, attention, etc.) with tasks selected according to the child's needs.

Gross motor development:

- Establishing basic movements;
- improving posture;
- developing balance;
- developing body awareness
- spatial orientation.

Fine motor development:

- Increasing finger mobility and dexterity;
- improving hand movements
- enhancing the tactile sense;
- eye–hand coordination
- Joint regulation of the sense of sight-touch-motion
- helping establish dominance.

Communication tasks:

- Developing auditory attention;
- expanding vocabulary;
- improving speech comprehension and encouraging speaking;
- developing speech form and content;
- improving speech intelligibility, rhythm, and pronunciation;
- acquiring nonverbal communication signals, learning to communicate and using any personal assistive devices.

Behavioral norm development:

- Tolerance and empathy;
- respecting each other, the environment, and wildlife;
- dealing with diversity;
- ethical behavior, standards, and role models;
- perceiving differences between good and bad, right and wrong, valuable and worthless, true and false;
- patience with partners.

Self-awareness exercises:

- Developing self-discipline;
- desire to succeed but also the ability to cope with failure;
- fostering social integration and harmony with self and others.



Using this handbook, we can learn the special characteristics of the following groups and how to implement the above types of activities most effectively with each:

- preschool children (typical and atypical development),
- primary school children (typical and atypical development),
- secondary school age children and young adults,

As a dog handler, it is extremely important to be aware of the specifics of the target group, as effective work is built on teamwork. The team consists of the child or young adult participant, the teacher, the handler, and of course the dog. The developmental goal can only be achieved if each team member knows the limits of their competence but also has a sufficient understanding of the others' work.

Flexibility is the most important feature of dog-assisted activities. To an outsider, sessions may appear less structured or planned, but after reading this manual, we hope you will appreciate the significant behind-the-scenes planning required to ensure professionalism and intentionality under all circumstances to achieve the objectives.

What is a ASL lesson?

Our handbook contains an acronym which we should clarify at the outset:

ASL – This is the term our foundation uses to describe “**Animal-assisted Special Lessons.**”

ASL classes are delivered during the first visit to a children’s community, where the focus is on education in responsible pet ownership and learning about the work of assistance dogs.

During these introductory lessons, we introduce as many tools as possible that are essential for dog ownership – for example, a pet passport and vaccination booklet (to talk about vaccination schedules), a dog brush and shampoo (for grooming), a collar and leash, a treat pouch with training treats, and of course a poop bag as part of the dog awareness program.

In addition to the tools, we talk about spaying/neutering, adoption versus buying from a conscious breeder, and we introduce youngsters to the concept of backyard breeding and how to recognize it – a very important part of responsible animal husbandry.

We also cover the basics of dog communication and the characteristics of different breeds to set children on the path to conscious breed selection or adoption.

Depending on the target group and age, we complement the lesson with an introduction to the work of assistance dogs, including demonstration tools. Our foundation's goal is to introduce responsible pet ownership to future pet owners from an early age and to show teachers and professionals the potential of dog-assisted activities. Additionally, we conduct attitude-shaping presentations that promote acceptance, empathy, and tolerance.

Finally, we must emphasize that this book is not a scientific treatise. While we have tried to support all our claims with literature, this is primarily a **practical manual** on *how* and *in what ways* to implement the most effective dog-assisted work for a given target group.



Grouping by target groups

The Preschool Years

Specific Features of the Preschool Years

A preschool child's life (approximately ages 3 to 6) is typically and decisively driven by **emotions**, which influence every expression and action. We can say children at this stage are *emotion-driven*. Children aged 3 to 6 years pay attention to and remember things that interest them and that they feel emotionally close to. Because they are guided by emotions, they tend to remember very positive or very negative events especially well. At this age, **involuntary attention and memory** are characteristic feature of children. Their drive and motivation are crucial in their activities.

The main activity of preschool children is **playing**, which is freely chosen and free from external constraints. Through playing, they get to know their environment, test themselves, establish social relationships, and learn to adapt.

Playing has a **complex impact**: it's a source of joy, a tension-reliever, and a means of personality development, and it is closely linked to learning activities.

Milestones in preschool development:

Children aged 3-6 (7) years show significant development in their language, social, motor and creative skills, as well as in their cognitive abilities.

By the end of preschool years, *language and communication* development in vocabulary grows significantly; children speak in sentences, constantly share experiences, and express emotions verbally and physiological speech errors are practically corrected.

During the preschool years *self-identity and social skills* undergo major development. Children need autonomy and opportunities to make decisions. By the end of the preschool years, they can verbally express their emotions.

They form friendships and learn to cooperate, and by around 5–6 they actively seek peer relationships.

Preschoolers' *motor skills* undergo incredible development during this period. Their fine motor skills include the ability to make small precise movements like holding a pencil, drawing, writing and using scissors. Their large movements become more coordinated and controlled. They are well-oriented in space and on flat surfaces, develop body awareness and laterality. They are physically active, enjoy moving, and are persistent in physical activities. Creativity emerges in practically all activities.

By the end of the preschool years, there are significant positive changes in cognitive functions. Attention, perception and cognition, memory, and thinking develop in parallel through playing, though not always at the same pace, and influence each other. Cognitive skill development influences learning ability effectiveness, affecting the child's later school performance.

During preschool period, involuntary attention gradually increases from just a few minutes to 25–30 minutes. Through playing and everyday experiences, sensory functions such as touch, balance, movement, vision, hearing, taste and temperature are significantly developed.

Factors influencing preschool development and intervention options:

Development is influenced by both *innate abilities, aptitudes* and *environmental factors*, which interact closely. However, environment is often the dominant influence. Proper nutrition and regular physical activity are the external factors crucial in regulating growth and maturation. It is extremely important to identify *intervention opportunities* during this sensitive period to compensate for any disadvantages, always in a complementary way, considering the child's developmental level, talents, abilities, and interests.

Preschool teachers are responsible for and required by the law to document children's development in the documentation system of the institution.

A document including the preschool development is mandatory that tracks each child's social, emotional, intellectual, motor, and speech development. Individual development plans based on these observations help to overcome disadvantages. Based on the results, children can be referred for further evaluation if needed. A specialist's assessment may recommend further development directions, the involvement of a special education expert, or even a change in institution type, which is then reviewed regularly, usually every two years.

Regardless of the progress direction, any developmental delay must be communicated to parents. Their cooperation and continuous feedback and consultation with parents/guardians/carers throughout the development process are essential and mandatory. It is very important to define the roles of each party - parents, kindergarten teachers - for effective development, and document the process. These records are archived when the child leaves nursery.

Generally speaking, early childhood, the period before starting school, is the most crucial stage of preschool. In Hungary, the approximately three years of compulsory education are critical in influencing a child's development and preparing them for school life, with the help of competent professionals in an enriching environment.

During this period – alongside individualized, small-group, or sometimes whole-group development activities, based on institutional assessments, – a child's development can be further assisted by institutional specialists or itinerant professionals if necessary. If an expert opinion deems a child “integrable”, these professionals come in to provide additional help.

The Boundary Between Typically and Atypically Developing Preschool Children

For **every area of development** (physical, psychological, emotional-social, cognitive, etc.), there is a range that is **most characteristic for a given age**. If a child exhibits the typical developmental traits for that age, we say they are a “**typical**” X-year-old. A child who deviates significantly in several areas is an *atypical* X-year-old.

By **the end of preschool**, a *typical* child has an adequate sensory and perceptual system, is capable of conceptual thinking, can focus attention intentionally, has understandable and expressive speech, has reliable short- and long-term memory, orients well in space and time, and has well-developed task awareness and attitude toward tasks.

The case for dog-assisted activities for preschool children:

“ More and more professionals believe that animals can be useful helpers for our children, teachers, and the educational process. Many of us think that kindergartens and schools can be more pleasant for children if we create a more lifelike, nature-oriented environment. We believe a companion animal can significantly impact education. Animals accustomed to our environment can effectively contribute to making the world of preschool and school more enjoyable. Our closest animal companions – dogs (and in some places horses, dolphins, and monkeys) – have practical knowledge of the human world that can be supportive. Meanwhile, simply through their presence, other companion animals can become important protective agents in the educational process. “ (Journal of Childhood Education, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 2.)

Based on the above research quote and our own experience, we can say that the presence and involvement of animals has a significant impact in preschool settings as well.

The mere presence of animals has **huge effects** on children – in physical, emotional, and social ways.

The mere presence of animals has a huge impact on children. These effects manifest themselves in three ways: physical, emotional, and social.

For children 3–6(7) years old, **physical touch** and the ability to hold and manipulate objects are very important due to their developmental stage.

That’s why physical contact with animals is so impactful. By touching, stroking, or hugging a dog, children’s heart rate and stress levels decrease and they feel calmer. Instead of anxiety, we see smiles and a desire to repeat the pleasant actions (stroking, hugging, etc.).

Because dogs can recognize human emotions and respond accordingly, children welcome their approach. Often the dog’s mere presence and physical closeness can relieve a child’s anxiety by distracting them from the source of stress. Preschool children usually happily talk to the dog, spontaneously expressing their emotions, which greatly contributes to their psychological well-being. The anxiety-reducing effect is visible, almost tangible. Preschool children who otherwise

have difficulty communicating verbally will often talk freely to the dog, cuddle up to it, and hug it. Initially, they may whisper; then their voice grows louder and they even start giving the dog commands. Sooner or later, this progress will be reflected in how they relate to people, as their self-confidence and self-esteem grow.

Working with animals is far less intimidating than many human interactions, so the dog helps children become more open and gives them a sense of security – crucial for organizing developmental activities at this age. Emotional attachment to the dog makes it easier for them to accept rules, expectations, and tasks: at first these focus on cooperating with the animal, but later the skills transfer to the child's social relationships. By sharing dog-related experiences with the group, **group cohesion** is strengthened and communication and cooperation with peers are facilitated. Recalling and verbally sharing experiences later has a positive impact on speech development and cognitive skills.

Activities with a dog or therapy animal also develop a child's **motor coordination**. In addition to improving gross motor skills, they impact fine motor skills and cognitive development. For example, throwing a ball for the dog or holding out a treat involves hand-eye coordination, timing, and following through a sequence of actions.





Structure of Animal-Assisted Activities in Kindergarten

The structure of animal-assisted activities in kindergarten does not differ much from the general session structure. The sessions include an **Introduction/Ritual**, a **Main Part**, **Play**, and **Conclusion**, implemented similarly as at other ages, but some elements have different importance at this stage and require more careful organization by the teacher and handler.

Creating a sense of **emotional security** for the preschool child is crucial. Thus, it is particularly important to properly prepare the animal-assisted session and plan its framework and flow.

Introduction/Ritual: In initial sessions, it's critical to tailor the introduction to the children's emotional state. In a group that is generally fearful of animals or has never interacted with them, the teacher should design an introductory ritual that keeps a safe distance at the beginning. Building trust is key. It isn't necessary to offer physical contact right away; it can suffice that the dog comes into the room and calmly walks around on leash with the handler at a safe distance from the children. Avoid even playful "greeting barks" at first, so as not to startle a child who's afraid. Later, once the group is comfortable (perhaps in the excitement of a game), a bark can be used as a fun greeting, but initially silence is better. If the dog walks calmly near the handler, clearly focused on the handler, the children will develop trust and feel that the dog will do only what the handler asks and only when the handler says.

Of course, gradually and according to individual needs, opportunities for contact can be offered: for example, while leading the dog around, invite children one by one to pet the dog or have the dog perform a simple trick for them, accepting a treat in return. **Consistency and gradualism** are very important for this age group. This is especially true for rituals: preschool children – especially 3–4-year-olds or those with special needs – love and need predictability, as it gives them security. Only small changes should be made step by step once a ritual is established. This requires very thorough knowledge of the group and children from the teacher and great attentiveness from the handler.

The *Main Part and Play* in the preschool age works best if they form a unified experience, since playfulness permeates the activity. It's more important for the teacher to know *why* they design a particular activity and what its purpose is, than to rigidly separate "main task time" from "game time." It is often sufficient to indicate to the child in one sentence that "now we'll have a great game," but ideally it flows naturally from the main activity.

That signal can help the child know that the session is nearing its end and it will soon be time to say goodbye to the dog – which has emotional importance at this age as well. Ending the session smoothly is as important as starting it: the child, even one who is anxious, should know how long the session will last.

The introduction and conclusion provide the **frame** for the session. It is very important that the child experiences separation (saying goodbye) in a positive way. They should have a choice in how they say farewell – whether through physical contact (stroking, cuddling, hugging) or by giving a treat or simply waving goodbye from a short distance. They should also have the choice of saying

goodbye quickly or spending a little extra time. Psychologically, it's critical that the child can manage this situation well; it is the key to subsequent successful sessions. Ensuring a good parting experience builds the child's trust for the future. (For instance, a child who didn't "win" during a game might get extra petting time as the dog says goodbye, ensuring they feel special attention.)



Features of the ASL Session Structure in Kindergarten

In the life of preschool children, shaping attitudes toward animal protection, responsible pet ownership, and understanding assistance dogs can be effectively achieved through play, just like any other field. Here too, the session length must be age-appropriate. Starting with sessions just a few minutes long for very young children, we can gradually work up to 35–40 minutes for older preschoolers. While much depends on age (a small group of 3-year-olds might only focus for 5–10 minutes, whereas 6-year-olds in their last preschool year can engage for 35–40 minutes), **gradual** extension of active, content-rich time is essential, always respecting the children's needs.

Motivation and the variety/quality of the **tools available** play an extremely important role, as these can motivate children to act and play. Three-year-old children often rely on sensorimotor thinking – actively doing and observing. Therefore, we need to create plenty of hands-on activity opportunities while also allowing quieter contemplation for those who need it, depending on their development.

If we allow enough time in the first encounters for getting to know the dog through experiential activities, even very young children will soon eagerly demand physical contact and interaction with the dog. As children's thinking matures, they become capable of **visual** thinking and eventually reach **verbal (linguistic) thinking**. At that stage, they can draw conclusions in their mind and understand deeper connections – e.g., why we must be responsible pet owners, or they can draw moral conclusions about the work of assistance dogs. When planning an ASL lesson, it's necessary to keep this developmental progression in mind.

From about **4–5 years old** onward, it becomes possible to plan more concept-based discussions, structured games, situational exercises, and interactive activities – starting simply at first, and increasing complexity as appropriate. The depth and complexity of the situation depends on children's development.

No matter the age group, sessions should remain **flexible** – we do not rigidly stick to a written script if the situation calls for adjustment. Always adapt to the group's knowledge, needs, and requirements. It's often said that a teacher's kit should be "*full of ideas*," ready to pull out alternative activities and variations on the fly. Quick adaptability is crucial.

Always choose topics that match the children's interests. With good preparation and starting early enough in the school year, we (teachers and handlers) can guide and influence children's interests ourselves. However, if during a session we see that the group is more interested in something else

(perhaps an unexpected question about the dog), we should feel free to switch gears to address that curiosity, then steer back gently to our objectives.

When planning and organizing an ASL or any animal-assisted kindergarten activity, keep in mind the following aspects, which should apply across the whole institution (all staff and parents):

- **Acceptance and inclusion:** An inclusive approach to animal-assisted methods. The entire staff should be on board, and parents should be informed and supportive.
- **Clear purpose and tasks:** Define the session’s purpose and tasks in advance (e.g., what skill are we developing today?).
- **Child and group knowledge:** The teacher must know the children well. Even within the same age, children will approach and interact with a dog differently. Be aware of which children might be fearful, excited, gentle, impulsive, etc., and plan accordingly.
- **Handler’s knowledge of the dog:** The handler must be confident in controlling and reading their dog’s signals.
- **Teacher–Therapist cooperation:** There should be a well-coordinated, communicative partnership between the teacher and the dog handler/therapist. Plan together, adjust roles as needed during the session, and debrief afterwards.
- **Teacher’s knowledge of dog tricks:** It helps if the teacher is familiar with what the dog can do (tricks, tasks) so they can cue those or build them into activities.
- **Handler’s understanding of educational goals:** The handler, even if not a teacher by training, should know what the session’s pedagogical objectives and tasks are.
- **Space and equipment:** Provide adequate space and make arrangements to accommodate the dog. For example, establish a fixed place in the classroom where the dog’s bed or mat will always be (a “passive” position for the dog when needed). Ensure any props or teaching aids are ready.
- **Staff support:** Ensure enough adults are present to assist (especially important if the group is large or includes children with special needs – an aide might sit next to a fearful child to model positive interaction, for example).
- **Shared plan:** Have a clear session plan that both the teacher and handler can “read” and follow, yet remain flexible to change as needed.
- **Playfulness:** Both teacher and handler should keep the tone playful and fun.

Introduction:

- Ensure emotional tuning-in. The introduction should set the session’s tone and direction.
- Depending on age/development, an introduction might be simply walking the dog around in front of the seated children. Here each child has a chance to decide if they want to pet the dog or not. A very helpful practice (that we use) is to stamp a little heart on the back of each child’s left hand (using our foundation’s paw-heart logo stamp) at the start; this can symbolize our togetherness during the session and later serve as a reminder for tasks such as “hold the leash with your heart-hand” (left hand). It’s practical and builds excitement. For children who are more fearful, it’s good for a familiar adult (like the teaching assistant or nanny) to sit beside them and set an example – willingly receiving the stamp, petting the dog, or encouraging from close by. At this age, the beloved adult’s example is very influential.
- A nice way to open the session and get children in the mood is to have the dog perform a greeting bark. However, use discretion: if it’s the first time, you may skip this if you sense it could scare some. The bark can be introduced later once the group is comfortable.
- A greeting ritual can be as simple as going around and saying hello: for example, the dog can give each child a “high-five” with its paw or the handler can help each child give the dog a treat. The key is every child gets to say hello in a way they are comfortable with – some might just wave while others want to hug.
- **Physical contact:** It is *very important* to give children an opportunity for physical contact early on – whether petting the dog, giving a treat, or getting a gentle “dog handshake.” Of course, always *offer* and never force – let each child choose to engage at their own pace. Psychologically, overcoming their own hesitation on their own terms strengthens their self-confidence, willpower, and self-image.
- The introduction also includes a short round of **introductions**. It’s important children know our (the handler’s and dog’s) names, and if we’ve met before, it’s a good chance to test their memory by asking if they remember. We might also share the dog’s breed, job (e.g., therapy dog), age, etc., making it personal.
- We often include a simple trick or two in the introduction to break the ice and get laughs – for instance, the dog can “wave” or spin around or sit when we say hello, and the children can mimic the dog’s actions. Having the children imitate the dog (sit, stand, spin, roll over how many times the dice shows, etc.) turns introductions into a fun game that releases inhibitions and shows the dog’s discipline and training in a positive way.
- We also clearly state *why* we are visiting. In preschool, it’s usually enough to say, “We’ve come to play!” and mention that we’ve brought toys to play with the dog. With older preschoolers (5–6 years old), we can briefly and matter-of-factly state the aim, e.g., “Today

we'll talk about how to take care of dogs and play lots of games to practice it.” In simple terms that they can grasp, of course.

Main part and Play:

- Many classic preschool games can be adapted into a “dog version.” The content goal (e.g., memory, counting, turn-taking) can be preserved but made more engaging by involving the dog.
 - For teaching responsible pet ownership, a game like “What’s under the blanket?” works well with dog care objects. For example:
 - *For younger children:* Show them a few pet care items (brush, leash, bowl, toy) by having the dog fetch them one by one and place them on a table. Let children observe, then cover the items with a blanket. After a short pause, remove the blanket and ask a child to pick up an item and tell what it is or what it’s used for (this builds short-term memory).
 - *For older preschoolers:* You might skip the fetching part and instead first display several items on a tray. Cover them, then secretly remove one or change the arrangement and see if they can spot what’s missing or different when you reveal them again (this strengthens recall and visual memory).
 - *For the oldest or most advanced kids:* Cover the items without prior showing. Have children reach under the blanket without looking, feel an object, and guess what it is by touch alone (this enhances tactile perception and deduction). You can tie it into caring for a dog by including items like a bone, a brush, a toy, etc.
- Children love the **Wheel of Fortune** (spinning wheel). We sometimes have a wheel with pictures that correspond to different tasks or information (like different assistance dog roles, different care tasks, or random tricks). A child or the dog can spin the wheel and whichever picture it lands on dictates the next mini-activity (e.g., “brush the dog”, or “have the dog jump”, or “everyone does a puppy pose”).
- **Surprise and mystery:** We use small bags or doggy saddlebags with pockets to create excitement. For instance, for a pairing activity, each child draws a picture of a dog from the dog’s side bag, then must find the classmate who has the matching picture of that same dog (like a memory match game done in real life).

In one version, we talk about the responsibility of raising puppies: we put pairs of dog pictures in two bags; each child draws one – those who get the same puppy picture become a pair (as “puppy siblings”) for the next game.

- **Sensitization game:** “The blind dog and owner” – pairs of children take turns leading each other; one child closes their eyes (or wears a blindfold) representing a blind person and the

other plays the guide dog, gently leading them around. At this age, this can be a truly enlightening experience to build empathy and trust (with supervision).

- As a fun conclusion or big movement game, couples can join together to form a long tunnel by standing in two lines and raising their arms to make an archway. Then the dog is called to **sneak through the tunnel** (encouraging it to weave through the legs or go under the arches). Children love seeing the dog playfully “snake” through the tunnel they created.
- **Ensure inclusion:** In every activity, we make sure no child is left out or feels like they “failed.” If a child successfully answers a question about a pet care tool, their “reward” might be to ask the dog to do a trick. If another child tries but answers incorrectly, we still give a reward – for instance, that child gets to choose how the dog will move to the next station (maybe crawling under their legs or stepping over them, whichever they prefer), or they get a turn to pet the dog. There should always be differentiation so that every child, regardless of their performance, gets positive reinforcement and a sense of participation.
- Always remind the children when the session is close to ending, so that when it’s over no one is caught off guard feeling, “Oh no, it’s done and I didn’t get to do X.” Usually we’ll say, “One more game and then we have to say goodbye to [Dog’s Name].”

Conclusion - farewell

- The goodbye can be as simple as the dog barking a farewell and waving (lifting a paw) as he leaves, or as involved as each child petting the dog one more time. Aim to end on a positive, calm note.

At minimum, we often have the dog do a friendly bark or trick to say goodbye and the children wave. If time allows, we let each willing child come up one by one for a final pat or hug. We always allow each child to choose how they say farewell—some might just want to wave from a distance; others want a big hug; others want to give a last treat or have the dog “shake hands.”

It’s also very important to coordinate beforehand with the teacher how the goodbye will happen so that it remains orderly and every child gets closure. For instance, the teacher might ask all children to sit in a circle and the handler walks the dog around for a final petting round.

After the dog exits, the teacher should encourage children to stay in their seats until the dog is fully gone and we have packed our things. This avoids children swarming the dog at the last second, which could be overwhelming for a tired dog and potentially dangerous if unsupervised. Thus, we leave the room the same way we entered – with children sitting calmly in their places. (We always emphasize that, as we leave, it is best for the dog’s safety and everyone’s to maintain the same quiet order as at the start.)



Competences of the handler and facility dog

Competences of the handler

The handler, whether a teacher or a not, must have the following competences:

- your dog has passed a test, has a valid test
- knowing your own dog
- an interest in the age-specific characteristics of the age group (e.g. studying ONOAP)
- pedagogical sensitivity, affinity
- love of children
- tolerance
- Flexibility
- ability to cooperate
- patience
- accuracy, reliability
- willingness to self-educate
- continuously training your facility dog, keeping his/her knowledge up to date, teaching new tricks and situations

Competences of the facility dog

- has passed the examination, holds a certificate issued by the training organisation together with his/her driver
- friendly, people- and child-loving
- cooperative, studious
- likes to participate in activities
- a wealth of tricks
- although friendly and open, he is cautious around small children
- wait patiently and obediently when necessary



The added educational value of animal-assisted, mindset-shaping - ASL - sessions

- Better well-being in the presence of a companion animal
- Motivation ← a sense of achievement
- Knowledge sharing ← special, positive emotional state
- Skills development ← not only information transfer but also learning skills
- Communication skills development ← clear, understandable communication is important in the plays with dogs
- Personality development ← working with a dog develops self-awareness, delaying needs, perseverance, self-discipline, self-control, acceptance, etc.
- Strengthening group cohesion ← "common cause" respect for each other and the dog, partner communication, helping and supporting each other can become the group norm



The Preschool Child with Atypical Development

Characteristics of Children with Atypical Development

The word “**atypical**” in this context means a child’s development deviates from the norm expected for their age. That is, the child is not exhibiting the typical behaviors or skills for that age group; their abilities fall outside the usual range. This divergence can be negative (a delay or disability) or positive (advanced or gifted for their age). *Atypical* by itself does not necessarily imply a disadvantage or deficiency—just difference.

Differences from typical development can be categorized by various terms that influence how we design and implement working with these children.

A child or student with **special educational needs (SEN)** is one who, according to the expert opinion of a specialized assessment committee, has one or more of the following: a physical, sensory, intellectual, or speech disability; autism spectrum disorder; multiple disabilities; or a permanent and severe disorder of cognitive or behavior development caused by organic factors.

Common categories under the SEN umbrella:

- physically disabled
- hearing impaired
- visually impaired
- speech impaired
- learning disabled (often defined as IQ around 70–50, mild intellectual disability)
- intellectually disabled (IQ around 50–30, moderate intellectual disability)
- multiply disabled (more than one disability)
- living with autism spectrum disorder

Other conditions often included (sometimes termed “learning or behavior difficulties”):

- ADHD (hyperkinetic syndrome)
- Chronic psychiatric disorders affecting learning/behavior
- Dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia
- Selective mutism (anxiety-related lack of speech in certain settings)



Definition: Intellectual Disability – results from hereditary and/or environmental impacts on central nervous system development, leading to general intellectual functioning significantly below average (from early childhood onward), causing notable difficulty in adapting to daily life (Czeizel et al., 1978).

Instead of the term intellectual disability, we increasingly use the term intellectual impairment, which we divide into two groups:

Children with intellectual disabilities – includes children with moderate, severe, and profound intellectual disabilities. Such intellectual disability significantly affects their development, social relations, and learning.

Learning Disability – (in Hungarian context often “tanulási akadályozottság”) refers to children who, because of a biological and/or genetic impairment of the nervous system or adverse environmental factors, have persistent and generalized learning difficulties (Mesterházi, 1998, p.54). This Hungarian term often overlaps with what might be called mild intellectual disability or significant learning difficulties in other contexts.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) –

At the behavioral level, autism spectrum disorders present a heterogeneous picture, but they consistently involve difficulties in social interactions, communication, and restricted or repetitive behaviors and interests. While these core features are consistent, the specific symptoms vary widely – hence the term “spectrum,” spanning very mild to severe presentations. Behavior is further influenced by co-occurring conditions that often accompany autism (e.g., intellectual impairment, unusual sensory reactions, eating and sleeping disturbances), which can also affect behavior. Regardless, behind the diverse outward behaviors is a common underlying developmental difference. Autism spectrum disorder occurs at all levels of intelligence, from those with average or above-average IQ to those with intellectual disability.



Developmental Characteristics of Preschool Children with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism – and Considerations for Dog-Assisted Activities

Intellectual disabilities in children are often identifiable before preschool age, sometimes from birth or early infancy. By the time they enter kindergarten, significant delays in several areas are usually apparent. They may have unsteady gross motor skills, clumsy fine motor manipulation, and show repetitive (stereotyped) movements. Low levels of alertness/arousal make them harder to motivate and they are easily distracted. Spatial awareness may be poorly developed; speech comprehension is weak; and communication is often heavily impaired (32/2012 EMMI Decree on SEN children).

It's common for preschool children with intellectual disabilities or autism to have **delayed speech development**. Therefore, the handler should be prepared for some children not to respond to questions or instructions in the typical way. Additionally, children who do speak may have limited expressive skills and vocabulary, and may exhibit speech sound disorders (e.g., issues due to cleft palate, jaw malformations, or low muscle tone in the tongue) which hinder clear speech. Their speech comprehension may be poor, and communication is frequently greatly impeded.

Guidelines for conducting sessions with these children:

- Use **short, simple words and sentences**.
- Use primarily common, concrete words.
- Avoid abstract concepts or idioms.
- **give one step at a time**. For example, instead of saying “Let’s stand up, form a circle, hold hands, and let the dog in the middle,” break it into single instructions: “Stand up. Good. Now form a circle. Great. Now hold hands. Okay, we’ll let the dog come into the middle.” This stepwise approach gives them time to process each part.
- **Repeat instructions** multiple times if needed, and be patient.

In many special kindergarten groups (in what are called Unified Educational and Methodological Institutions, *EGYMI*, which are special education preschools in Hungary), **alternative communication methods** are used to help children understand and express themselves. Before the ASL lesson, ask the teacher what methods or aids the children use. If they use the **PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)** or other visual schedules, prepare some picture cards in advance that relate to our activities so we can show them to reinforce meaning. For example, have a picture of a dog to indicate when the dog will be present, pictures for “brush”, “treat”, “game”, etc. Coordinate with the teacher on which visual aids to incorporate. It’s also helpful if the teacher places a “dog” card on the children’s daily schedule on the day of the visit, so they know to expect it. (We have compiled a set of PECS cards that can be used in ASL lessons – see Appendix ...).

Children with intellectual disabilities often have poor control over their movement strength and timing. They might only be able to move at one speed or with one level of force. They can only manage a simple sequence of movements of quite short duration. Their movements often lack rhythm and appropriate energy.

You may observe **perseveration in movement** (repetitive meaningless movements) which are quite difficult to interrupt. A common example is body rocking – folding the trunk forward and back, often seen during play, intense exercise, or heightened excitement; it can also indicate distraction or fatigue. In gross motor tasks, keep tasks very simple. While typically developing children easily handle combined instructions like “squat down and then jump up”, an intellectually disabled preschooler may find that extremely complex. Be sure to have the special education teacher or aide help demonstrate or physically assist the child in performing movements if needed.

Fine motor skills are also weaker. For instance, the child may not be able to pinch a treat and give it to the dog properly. It may require hand-over-hand help or adapting the activity (like using a spoon to deliver a treat instead of fingers).

Children with autism spectrum disorder also show large differences in mobility. Some move age-appropriately or even excel at certain movements (climbing, spinning, etc.). Development might be uneven: they may skip certain gross motor developmental phases or have unusual patterns (quantitative differences), and they often have differences in muscle tone (qualitative differences), commonly low muscle tone (hypotonia) affecting posture. For these children, visual cues (like pictograms of the actions) can help them understand what to do and how long the session will last. Demonstration is usually more effective than verbal explanation – so we try to *show* rather than tell whenever possible.

For children with intellectual disabilities, **perception and cognition** are less differentiated. For example, they notice fewer details when observing objects and cannot list many properties beyond naming the object. Their attention span is very narrow and they cannot split attention between multiple things at once. It's advisable to prepare several **short, simple tasks**, with frequent changes in activity to re-engage their attention. Short-term and long-term memory, as well as the processes of memorization, retention, and recall, are significantly weaker than age norms – so repeating activities over multiple sessions is helpful.

Children with autism spectrum disorder often have difficulty engaging in cooperative or imaginative play with others. Due to underlying challenges in symbolic thinking and imagination, they may not play certain kinds of pretend games or only do so in limited ways. They often prefer **constructive play, cause-and-effect toys, or puzzles** – activities which give concrete results – as these provide a sense of success. However, each child with ASD is different. Many have trouble with rule-based games and understanding that the game doesn't follow their own script but has its own structure to which they must adapt. It is essential to **clearly define rules in advance** and not change them mid-game, as children with ASD typically struggle with changes and that could cause confusion or distress.

Children with autism can also have sensory aversions – for example, they might not want to touch certain textures or objects. It's common for them to resist touching sticky treats or certain materials. For these kids, we adapt by using tools like a “magic wand” treat dispenser: a little tube that holds treats so they can give a treat without directly touching food. Many appreciate this – they shake the wand, and some treats fall out for the dog with permission, allowing them to participate in rewarding the dog without discomfort.

Some of these children might not remain engaged in the activity throughout. The handler must be prepared for the possibility that a few children will not be able to remain focused on or interested in the dog activity all the time. It's important to tailor tasks to each child's abilities and attention span. Engage them when possible, but also allow some freedom of movement or a quiet break area if needed for children who become overwhelmed.

On the other hand, these children often have very good **rote memory and routine learning** skills we can leverage. They might remember specific facts about the dog or mechanical routines and excel at them, even if creative or social aspects are harder. Always try to map out what the child already knows or can do, and build on that. Being with peers and seeing them model interactions with the dog can also help these children learn spontaneously, improving communication and adaptability over time.

Following the general conditions for ASL sessions for typical children, here is how we adapt for a kindergarten group with atypical development. Note that there is no one-size-fits-all recipe—especially for this group of children—so everything must be tailored to the specific needs of the group.



Structure of ASL session (adaptations for atypical development):

Introduction/ritual:

- Allow **more time** than usual for children to adjust to the dog's presence and to become comfortable.
- Do **not force** interaction. Sometimes the dog's passive, patient presence nearby is enough to give a child a sense of security that eventually encourages them to open up.
- Avoid having the dog bark as a greeting; many of these children can be extremely sound-sensitive.
- Don't expect immediate interactions like giving a treat or high-five. It may be enough for a child to simply touch the dog with assistance. (At first, an aide might guide a child's hand to pet the dog briefly. The handler should stay vigilant to intervene if the child unintentionally grabs fur or squeezes too hard, etc.)
- Monitor week to week how children become more independent with the dog and encourage more direct interaction as they grow more comfortable.
- **Constant vigilance** is necessary. Some children might unexpectedly pull the dog's fur, squeeze a body part, or step on the dog's paw without understanding it could hurt. It is the handler's responsibility to prevent such incidents—by closely supervising and

positioning the dog or the children so as to avoid mishaps. The dog should be under strict control and on leash as needed, particularly early on.

- Incorporate introductions into the tasks. For example, practice saying the dog’s name or the adults’ names, even if children have limited speech – this can be done through picture cards or assistive devices if they use them.
- Avoid sudden movements or tricks that could be alarming. Sometimes an unexpected trick can frighten these children, though it might break the ice for others. Gauge the child’s reactions. If a child cannot or will not ask the dog to do a trick verbally, the handler might simply demonstrate one or have the dog perform it to show the child. The key is not to pressure the child to give commands if they cannot; the handler can model it.

Main part and Play:

- Put extra emphasis on pacing and **distributing tasks**, as these children fatigue more easily and concentrate for less time.
- It’s always a good idea to incorporate movement breaks or “warm-ups” involving the dog: e.g., setting up a simple obstacle course that all children (and the dog) go through, with the dog waiting at the end for a pet—this engages them physically before cognitive tasks. For more passive children, start with something active to increase engagement.
- **Active group warm-up:** “Dog dance school” – the dog demonstrates a movement (like turning in a circle, sitting, standing, lying down, waving), and the children copy it. Or “Dog school” game: one child in each pair imitates the dog, and the other acts as handler giving simple commands (with adult help). Only demonstrate doable tasks and heavily emphasize petting and praising the dog as part of the activity, which they will also mimic with each other.
- Focus on **care tasks and tools**, which even children with significant disabilities can often participate in. Activities like brushing the dog with a simple brush, carrying a bowl of water to give the dog a drink, etc., are achievable with assistance and develop empathy as well as motor skills. For example, a child can carry a spoon with a treat on it across an obstacle path to feed the dog at the end – even if they can’t handle small treats with fingers, they can manage a big spoon or cup.
- When giving water to the dog, everyone can quiet down and listen to the dog *slurp* – this can stimulate auditory perception and is usually amusing (and not too loud).
- Use **matching and sorting tasks** with visual support: e.g., have pictures of the dog’s care items and the actual items. Children can match the picture to the real object (like pairing a picture of a brush to the actual brush). Limit the number of items to avoid overwhelming them – but also not too few that it lacks challenge entirely. Use realistic images since some children may not recognize a stylized cartoon as easily as a photo. If direct matching is too hard, use a one-to-one correspondence task first (hand them a photo of the leash when the leash is in view, etc.).
-

Conclusion – farewell:

- Try to end the session **before** the children become overly tired or restless. Watch for signs of fatigue and wrap up accordingly.
- Ensure everyone gets a **positive experience** at the end, just as with typically developing kids. For example, even if a child did not participate much, they could still come pet the dog or hold the leash as you say goodbye. Perhaps the dog can perform a little trick specifically for each child as a farewell (a gentle “hug” or a wave) and the other children can applaud – so each child feels acknowledged.
- You might find that by the end of even the first session, some previously apprehensive children are eager – take advantage of that but still in small steps. For example, a child who was too anxious to feed the dog by hand could put a treat on the toe of their shoe and allow the dog to eat it from there (with permission). That minimal physical contact can be a big triumph for them. Always leave opportunities for spontaneous touch if a child initiates it, as long as it’s safe.

The success of sessions with atypically developing children is **greatly influenced by the presence of teachers and assistants**, as certain children in the group will need individualized support or supervision. Always coordinate with the teachers and aides ahead of time and clarify roles: who will stay with which child, who will manage the group logistics, etc. The dog handler’s responsibility is not to know each child’s every need from the start – they should ask the teacher for guidance on this.





Competencies of the Handler and Facility Dog (for preschool sessions)

Competencies of the handler (for preschool sessions): Whether the handler is a teacher or not, they must have:

- A dog that has passed the required test and has a valid certification.
- Deep knowledge of their own dog's behavior, signals, and limits.
- Interest in the age-specific characteristics of preschoolers (e.g., by studying the National Core Program for Preschool Education, understanding child development).
- Pedagogical sensitivity and affinity – ability to relate to and manage young children.
- Love of children.
- Tolerance and patience.
- Flexibility – ability to adapt the session plan as needed.
- Cooperation skills – working well with the teacher or assisting staff.
- Accuracy and reliability – being prepared, punctual, and responsible.
- Willingness to self-educate continuously (both in dog handling and in understanding child development or special needs).
- Ongoing training of the facility dog – keeping the dog's skills fresh, teaching new tricks, and maintaining training over the dog's lifetime.

Competencies of the facility dog :

- Has passed the facility dog exam and holds a certificate with their handler.
- Friendly, people- and child-loving temperament.
- Cooperative and eager to learn; enjoys participating in activities.
- Though friendly and open, is cautious and gentle around small children
- Can patiently and obediently wait when necessary
- Possesses a variety of learned tricks or behaviors that can be used in sessions
- While friendly and outgoing, the dog must tolerate children's occasionally rough or clumsy touches to a degree – *however, note:* the dog is not required to endure all mishandling; it's the handler's job to prevent truly rough handling in the first place!



Primary School Pupils – Lower Grades (Ages 7–10)

Characteristics of Early School-Age Children

After preschool, the next stage is meeting school expectations. All the years and activities of preschool are consciously aimed at helping children reach **school readiness**. In Hungary, every child who turns six by August 31 of a given year is required to start school that year (unless an assessment recommends otherwise).

Historically, school (as a secondary socialization environment) had the role of imparting knowledge. Initially, skill development was at the heart of schooling's mission, but today this has shifted. Modern families often have both parents working, leaving less time for direct parental involvement with children. This has led to changes in the child's development context. As a result, today's schools place much greater emphasis on **personal development, prevention, and correction**, not just academic knowledge transfer. For children, the family is no longer the sole primary socializer; thus, the school must partially compensate for this.

It is clear that personal development in school requires different tools and teacher competencies than in the past, and teachers must be open and flexible to fulfill these evolving roles.

Effective cooperation in school also requires that the child meet certain criteria for **school readiness**. School readiness is not a single set of abilities but rather meeting a range of expectations that society (and the school system) has for children entering school. A child should be able to leave the play-focused life of kindergarten and handle spending the school day in a classroom, focusing attention, and forming new social relationships. Criteria include things like self-regulation, the ability to adopt the learner role, and the use of strategies to tackle tasks.

Additionally, certain **physical, biological, and motor conditions** are expected: roughly 120–130 cm in height, 20–22 kg in weight, good general health and fitness. Signs of maturity around age 6 include changes in body proportion (more upright posture, limb growth), the loss of baby teeth and eruption of permanent teeth, established lateral dominance (right- or left-handedness), fine motor skills sufficient for writing, and coordinated gross motor skills.

Among necessary **skills**: spatial orientation (knowing left vs right, up vs down, etc.) is important for reading and writing. The child should recognize shape differences, figure-ground distinctions (e.g., picking out a letter from a background) – basically being able to filter relevant vs irrelevant information. They should be able to recognize similarities and differences. A certain level of conceptual thinking and problem-solving ability is needed, as well as adequate memory and attention span. They must be able to *understand* spoken instructions and have adequate *expressive language* to communicate answers or needs.

Psychological conditions include the child’s ability to follow rules, having a sense of rules and structure. They should be able to cooperate with peers in a group. There should be a sufficient need for achievement (motivation to do well) and an ability to tolerate failure and monotony (not everything at school is exciting all the time).

In summary, a typically developing child must meet many conditions – physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally – to begin school smoothly. It is very important to help any child who is lagging behind in some area during the early school years. There are now many ways to support children’s development in the early grades – and **dog-assisted therapy** is one such tool.

Characteristics of 6–7-Year-Olds (First Grade)

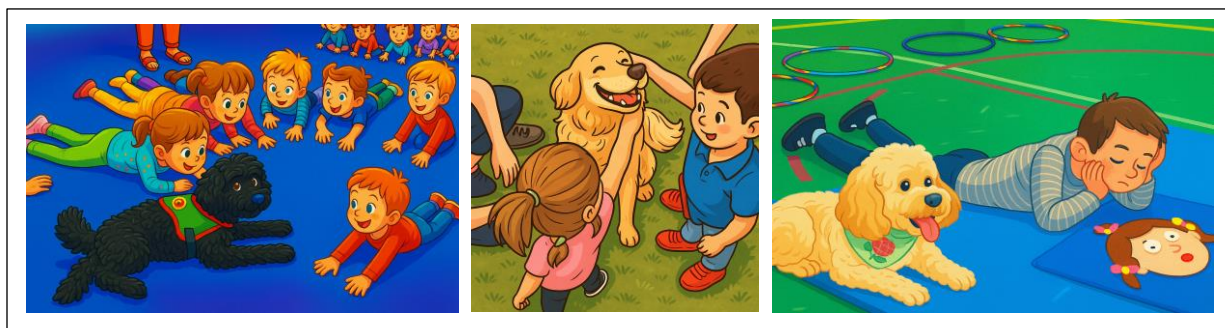
By about age 6 or 7, most children can attend to their basic self-care independently (dressing, toileting, eating properly with utensils). They generally can meet their own basic needs without help, follow classroom routines (like taking their coat off and putting it away). Socially, they know basic manners (greetings, taking turns to talk). They start showing interest in peers, initiate play, and can offer help to each other.

Their language skills are usually quite developed: they use full sentences to tell stories or describe experiences. Their narrations have continuity and a logical sequence (though their grammar may still have mistakes, these usually resolve by this age). Their vocabulary is growing rapidly, and they love word play, riddles, songs, and rhymes. They also begin to listen to longer stories and can recall or summarize them. Moreover, they start to want to share their own stories or comment on them – budding comprehension and opinion-forming skills.

With the right preschool foundation in fine motor skills, at 6–7 they learn to **write**. They start mastering the symbol system where letters correspond to sounds – thus, they learn to **read**. Their numeracy skills also develop: they grasp number concepts and quantities, and learn the symbols for numbers and basic arithmetic operations.

Socially, they are ready to work in small groups. They form the first real **friendships** and peer alliances which can influence them strongly.

As they develop, we see improvements in language, social skills, self-esteem, autonomy, resilience, and base of knowledge. These are all fields where targeted intervention can help if needed (for example, a child struggling with confidence could benefit from success experiences in a dog-assisted therapy session).





Characteristics of the structure of primary school activities for children aged 7-1

In this case, the dog sessions can also be divided into three parts, which we have already known: introduction, main part and the ending. However, for this group, the execution can vary in several directions, depending on the objective to be achieved.

In general, we start every session with a greeting, which includes the dog. We can ask the child where they live, their mum or dad's name, grandma or grandpa's name, etc. If it is a school programme, curricula are given, whether it is a maths, literature, language or physical education lesson, these are included in the curriculum of the institution. The dog and his handler will help you to work through the given topic. He motivates you with his presence, rewards you with a trick if you get it right, and encourages you rather than judging you if you get it wrong. The main part can also include group work, in which the dog can also play an assisting role - helping to allocate groups, check and reward. This ensures that the monotony is broken up a bit and there is a chance for a bit of play. In the concluding part, the children can individually express the lessons and difficulties of the lesson, addressing the dog, thus facilitating honesty and communication. The teacher who leads the lesson also has the opportunity for a freer evaluation at the end of the session.



ASL Sessions for Primary School (Lower grades)

Our ASL sessions at this stage still prioritize responsible pet ownership and assistance dog awareness, but children at this age are very open to learning and can handle more factual information.

Introduction

- Greet the dog and handler. Possibly review earlier content quickly (e.g., ask a couple of children to recall what assistance dogs do).
- It may be appropriate to discuss in a bit more depth the foundation's work or why the dog is here – using children's language but adding facts. Avoid jargon, but at 7–8 they can understand slightly more complex sentences than preschoolers.
- Give each child a turn to personally greet the dog if possible (coming out to do a high-five or the dog going to each desk briefly). For a fearful child, maintain the practice of not forcing them – invite them out; if they hesitate, perhaps you and the dog greet them together at their seat gently later.

Main Part (responsible pet ownership example):

- Explore prior knowledge: Ask, “Who has a dog at home? What do you do to take care of your dog?” This discussion can guide how basic you need to start. If many have pets, you can delve into deeper topics; if not, start with basics.
- Show various **tools** (like in preschool but now you can involve kids in describing uses or even reading labels for older ones). Perhaps make it into a quiz or competitive game: hold up an item (brush, leash, muzzle, etc.) and ask a team to name it and say why it’s needed. Points or the dog’s “approval” (bark for correct) as incentives.
- Once they know the tools, make it harder: incorporate a **memory or treasure hunt**. For instance, hide the dog’s care objects around the classroom beforehand; then have the dog find them one by one and bring them to a central spot. Each time the dog brings something (like a collar), the children have to identify it and discuss its purpose (“What is this for? Why is it important?”). This physical search keeps them engaged.
- In 3rd or 4th grade, you can go further: propose a scenario – “If you were taking care of a dog, list tools you’d need”. Children can write a list in groups and then check against the actual items (and the dog can “help” check by pawing at an item as it’s named).
- Emphasize **behavior around dogs** – use visual cue cards if available (like posters saying “Don’t run from a dog” or “Let a dog sniff your hand before petting”). After discussing these, you can role-play with the dog: a student demonstrates the wrong way (running, startling from behind) vs the correct way to approach a dog, and the class can point out which is right. The dog (with handler’s guidance) will react calmly to the correct approach and perhaps act confused or bark lightly if someone sneaks up unexpectedly, illustrating the point.
- Cover topics like **stray dog safety**: what to do if they encounter a dog without an owner. Make it interactive – maybe show pictures of a friendly dog posture vs. an aggressive posture and get children to interpret signs. Ensure to convey: if a dog is friendly (wagging, relaxed), what steps to take (don’t run, notify an adult, perhaps check the tag if safe, etc.), and if a dog shows attack signals (stiff body, growling), how to behave (stay calm, avoid eye contact, back away slowly, etc.). These can be illustrated with images or a short video snippet if available. The dog present in class might demonstrate a friendly approach – e.g., approach a child softly with loose body and wagging tail – versus show (under handler control) what an alert stance looks like (perhaps have the dog focus on a toy intently to illustrate stiffness). However, we avoid actually provoking any aggression in the dog for demonstration; visuals suffice for that part.
- Use **situation exercises**: e.g., act out going to the vet. Pick one child to be the vet, one as the vet’s assistant, another as the dog’s owner. With the dog present, they simulate a vet visit: checking the dog’s ears (with pretend otoscope), looking at his teeth, etc., using a

vaccination booklet prop. Through this playful skit we can talk about why dogs need vaccines and deworming, etc., in a way that's concrete.

- **Assistive dog basics** (if age 8–9): Introduce that some dogs help people – like guide dogs for the blind, hearing dogs, mobility service dogs. For younger primary kids, use hands-on demonstrations: e.g., blindfold a volunteer and have another child with the dog lead them walking – showing how a guide dog helps. Keep it safe and simple (maybe navigating around a few chairs). For hearing dogs, you could ring a bell behind a child who's covering their ears, and have the dog signal them (if the dog knows such a cue; if not, just explain). Let them imagine how a dog might help someone in a wheelchair by picking up dropped keys – then show the dog doing a retrieval of an object. These examples build empathy and start discussions on disability and how dogs assist.
- Throughout, listen to children's feedback and adjust. If they are full of questions, follow that curiosity — even if it wasn't in the exact plan, those questions often lead to meaningful learning moments. If they seem confused or bored, switch to a more active game with the dog to regain their interest, then circle back to the topic.
- Always integrate some **fun physical game** with the dog mid-session for this age as well – they still need movement. For instance, five kids who answer questions correctly get to line up and hold a hoop tunnel for the dog to crawl through at the end – ensure no child is left without a role by giving alternative rewards to those who attempted (maybe they get to pet the dog after he runs the tunnel).

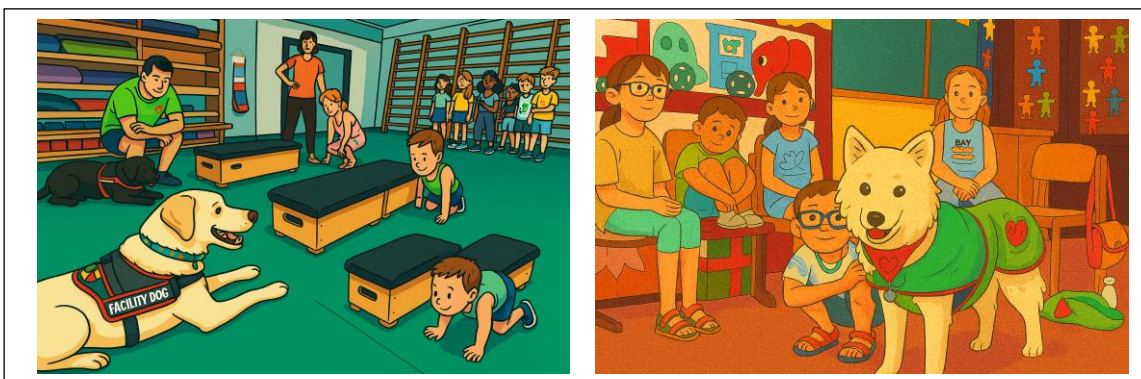


Conclusion – farewell

- At the end, as with any session, let each child have a final interaction. Perhaps ask each child to tell the dog one thing they learned or enjoyed (which is often easier than telling the teacher – the dog is a non-threatening listener).
- Let them say goodbye similarly to how the preschoolers did: one by one pet or give a treat, or have the dog perform a “thank you” trick (like giving each a paw).
- Encourage them to share the session experience with their parents at home – this not only reinforces the lessons but spreads awareness (and children love to brag about the dog that came to class).

It’s important to emphasize that the above outlines are not all implemented in a single 45-minute lesson – one must choose what fits and sometimes stretch content over multiple sessions. We might decide to focus one session mostly on proper behavior around dogs, and another on assistive dog roles, etc. Always decide in advance which topics to delve into deeply and which to just touch on, depending on the group’s interests and time available.

Finally, **flexibility** remains key even in primary classes. While older children can follow a plan more rigidly than preschoolers, being open to where the dog or children’s curiosity leads within the educational goals is crucial for maximizing the session’s impact.





Competencies of the Handler and Facility Dog (Primary School)

Competencies of the handler (teacher or not) for working with school-age children:

- Dog certified as therapy/facility dog (with valid test).
- Knowing one's own dog thoroughly.
- Pedagogical sensitivity
- Love of children (still absolutely necessary!).
- Flexibility and linguistic adaptability
- Cooperation
- Accuracy and reliability – coming to sessions well-prepared
- Continual self-education – e.g., learning new educational games or keeping up with special needs strategies, in addition to ongoing dog training practice.
- Basic knowledge of dog communication
- Basic knowledge about assistance dogs
- Basic knowledge of different disability types and their

Competencies of the facility dog for primary school sessions:

- Certified with handler as per regulations.
- Calm, balanced, very well-controlled by the handler at all times.
- Affectionate but not intrusive. The dog should be able to “open up” to children on its own (approach those who call it calmly) but not demand constant attention if not appropriate.
- Able to perform certain assistance dog Even doing these tasks on the handler's command, it's an impressive and educational skill set.
- Active but controlled participation in movement tasks
- Cue-trained barking is particularly useful If the dog can, it's a great interactive tool (**like**
- Similarly, retrieving objects is extremely useful for working
- The dog should be the **most flexible** with this age group, because activities in primary school can vary widely



Primary School Pupils – Upper Grades (Ages ~11–14)

Characteristics of Older Children in Primary School (Pre-teens)

The next big developmental milestone occurs around ages 11–13: **puberty**. On the road to adulthood, we typically identify pre-puberty (young adolescence, 11–13 years), puberty proper (adolescence, 14–18 years), and youth/young adulthood (18–21 years). The exact timing differs per individual.

Key features of early adolescence (pre-teens):

During this period, children’s relationship with their family slowly changes and a phase of so-called *rebellion* often begins. This is essentially resistance against the norms established by parents – a natural part of identity seeking and stabilization. The young person experiences a kind of internal crisis: everything they have believed in seems to be shifting. They may also feel the burden of expectations (such as starting to think about their future, career choice, etc.), which can affect them deeply. It’s a difficult and seemingly hopeless process at times, but it’s an integral part of their personal development. By the end of adolescence, the goal is that the young person has developed a healthy relationship with family (now transformed), friendships change in nature, their views on sexuality mature, their self-esteem and self-concept become more stable, and they are ready to take on adult responsibilities.

Of course, this describes an ideal progression; reality is rarely so tidy. This period—especially early adolescence—is extremely sensitive. Whether or not overt “problems” are present, teens need emotional support during these years. Even a well-adjusted 12-year-old benefits from somewhere to channel stress, build confidence, and discuss feelings.



The justification for dog-assisted therapy at this stage:

Let's recall the general positive impact of dogs: They boost self-confidence, self-esteem, self-assurance, autonomy—*without* it feeling like a performance is being judged. Considering the developmental process of the human personality, we likely don't need to further explain why having a companion animal is also beneficial at this life stage. The general tension characteristic of young adolescents, internal conflicts or anxiety, and difficulty expressing emotions are all issues where a companion animal's presence can significantly influence outcomes.

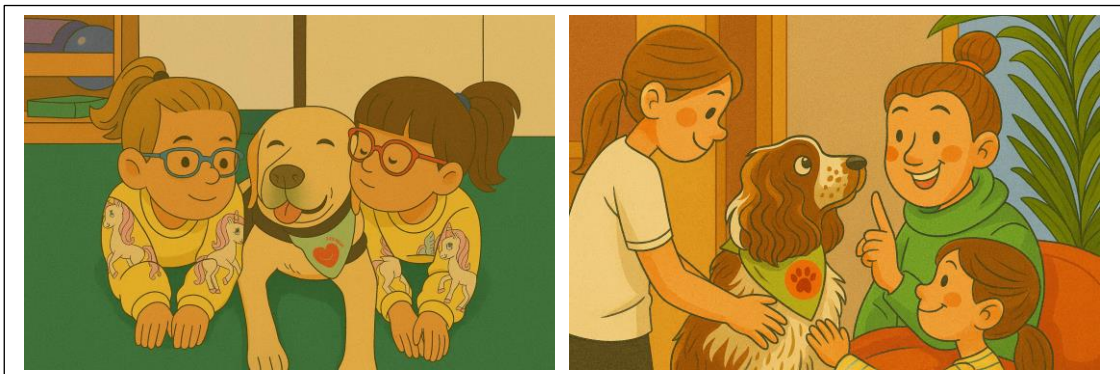
A dog provides nonjudgmental companionship. For a pre-teen who might feel adults don't understand them, talking while petting a dog or doing a task with the dog can be a way to open up indirectly. The dog can also be a **social catalyst** in group settings, giving them a shared positive focus instead of worrying about peer judgment.



Structure of upper primary school dog sessions

If we want to work with this age group, we have to take into account some facilitating and perhaps complicating factors. It may be easier because young people in this age group are open-minded and have a lot of prior information that allows them to pass on complex information. A difficulty is that, although they may think of themselves as half, or perhaps fully, grown up, they still need to be treated as children. This can also cause some tension during sessions, so make sure you use the right language, let them try, but help them to complete the task if necessary. A lot of their inhibitions and anxieties can affect their performance in class, so try to alleviate these, focusing on the dog as much as possible, so that the child feels that there is no one to judge, ridicule or criticise their actions. The right atmosphere of trust and partnership will help to ensure a successful session.

It is similar in structure to the previous ones, but the knowledge to be imparted is increasingly difficult. Institutionally, it continues to follow a set curriculum. In addition to very complex classroom activities, we need to provide opportunities for spontaneous interaction, for living in the moment. The role of the dog can be that of a catalyst for communication, helping young people to open up and initiate a discussion on sensitive issues affecting the age group, such as drug use, eating disorders, loneliness, etc. The dog's presence can therefore be used in a wide range of situations.



Structure of upper primary school ASL sessions

The structure of the sessions at upper secondary level is very similar to that at lower secondary level, so we don't feel the need to go into detail again, but would like to focus on the small differences.

Introduction

- The introduction gives us the opportunity to talk in more depth about
 - how a dog becomes a therapy or other assistance dog
 - how to become a facility dog handler
 - what health conditions they must meet
 - what target groups we work with
 - what makes the method effective
- It is necessary to overcome initial shyness and anxiety, so it is worth telling about the dog present and asking questions about the dogs to the group present - this will also help to explore prior knowledge
- It's important to know that the older children get, the less they like to act - with a few exceptions. So let's not wait for volunteers, but avoid the awkward moments that come with it. Please ask our present dog, to "pick someone". This can be done by sitting him down in front of someone (it's a good idea to use hand signals, which are less obvious and make it look like the dog has chosen), or even sending the dog out among the children and seeing who he stops for more than a few moments and says he has chosen him.
- Ask a lot of questions about the assistance dogs, about the injured people around you, so that you can assess the direction you can take in the future, how inclusive the group is

Main part

- In this age group, we can put more emphasis on shaping attitudes.
 - pictures to show the types of disabilities
 - where the assistance dogs appear
 - what a dog can do to help
 - be careful when discussing depression and anxiety, as some young people may become self-aware in the process
 - help to create a positive experience through live demonstration, or even first-hand experience - with a well-trained assistance dog, he can see for himself how the dog performs the tasks. If possible, we can also invite a person with an assistance dog to participate, bringing them even closer together.

- We have the opportunity to talk about dog communication in more depth, with pictures, video analysis
- You can get a deeper insight into shelter life, the importance of adoption and the dangers of breeding. Highlight the importance and necessity of neutering
- Before choosing a career, show them the helping pASLesson as an option or even the possibilities of dog training
- The realisation of these themes depends only on the creativity of the handler
 - you can take different video recordings, analyse in small groups and reward the correct answers or those who do well with a group trick (jumping obstacle or tunnel).
 - we can categorise the dog's signals, which picture belongs to the positive and which to the negative signals
 - bring a short educational text on the importance of adoption, which they can also work on in small groups. Make a thought map and present it to the class, the dog will of course be an integral part of the check, barking and rewarding with a high five if they have done their job correctly.

Again, it is important to stress that the topic is always determined by the state and knowledge of the group, which needs to be adapted even on the fly. Take into account the sensitivity or motivation of the people present. Don't be afraid to play a quick dog game to help the children's behaviour.

Conclusion - farewell

- give children the opportunity to express themselves individually, telling the dog only how they felt, what they learned, etc.
- You can give them small sheets of paper on which they can write down their experiences, thoughts and wishes anonymously, which they can put in a pocket on the dog's harness - and the dog walker promises to read it to their four-legged companion at home.
- It is also important to note that young people often come to ask questions after the session has ended. We should also pay attention to this and give them the opportunity to express their thoughts without being heard. Often they just need someone to listen, but if we have given them a really exciting session, they may have had a thought pop into their head, which could be about their pet dog, their future plans or anything they need reassurance or advice about.





Competences of the handler and facility dog

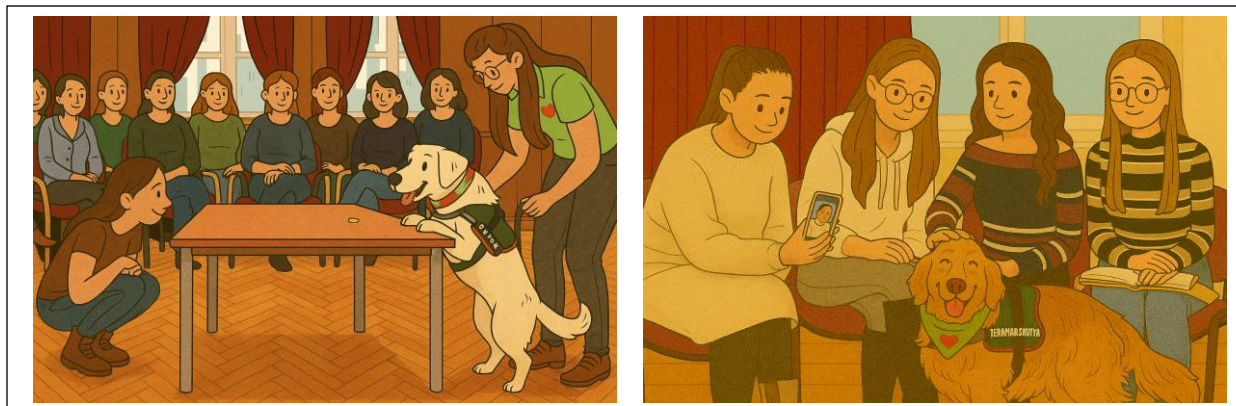
Competences of the handler

The handler, whether a teacher or a not, must have the following competences:

- your dog has passed a test, has a valid test
- knowing your own dog
- pedagogical sensitivity, affinity
- flexibility, sense of humour
- ability to cooperate
- balance, predictability
- continuously training your facility dog, keeping his/her knowledge up to date, teaching new tricks and situations
- basic knowledge of dog communication
- basic knowledge about assistance dogs
- basic knowledge of the different types of disability and their characteristics

Competences of the facility dog:

- passed the examination, is licensed with his/her driver
- calm, balanced, well controlled
- affectionate but not intrusive, but able to open up to children on his/her own when necessary
- be able to perform certain assistance dog tasks - not just with the handler
- active but controlled participation in movement tasks
- barking on cue is the most useful, but not mandatory, element here
- likewise, retrieval - can be extremely useful, but is not a necessity
- the dog working with this age group should be the most flexible, as it will encounter the most diverse range of activities
- passive role is more common, so it is necessary that the dog tolerates it well



Atypical child in primary school

Characteristics of atypically developing primary school children

In our handbook, we have learned about the types of atypical development in preschool children that we encounter in our work. You can read more about this in detail there.

Furthermore, in this section of the handbook, we do not feel the need to present atypically developing children in lower and upper grades in separate groups. Nevertheless, we have tried to summarise the most typical points for this group in a detailed and clear way.

We are already aware that atypically developing children are generally considered to be pupils with special educational needs (SEN for short), which is defined very precisely by law. These children have the option of attending mainstream primary schools in an integrated form or segregated form in so-called integrated special educational institutions. When we meet children with SEN in mainstream primary schools, we must be aware that their presence is subject to very strict legal and institutional regulations. They require extra assistance and attention, which for us, as handlers, is an important signalling value, because with the presence of the dog, we can easily provide them with this. It is worth paying attention to the pupil, but not to be too intrusive, and we must also ensure that excessive attention does not cause dislike in his or her peers.

If you have the opportunity to work with children with SEN in a segregated institution, you should pay attention to. The structure of the classroom in a SEN is such that there is usually a separate class for children with learning disabilities and children with moderate intellectual disability, but there can also be integration, i.e. a well-functioning child with moderate intellectual disability can, with some extra support, succeed in a class of children with learning disabilities. Children with severe intellectual disability are in a further group where they receive specialised development under the supervision of specially trained professionals. Children with learning difficulties can also attend an eight-grade school after kindergarten, after which they can continue their education in a vocational school or a specialised school for skills development. As with all educational institutions, the aim of the special schools is to enable students to lead independent lives and find employment when they reach adulthood.

Today, in Hungary, in addition to state organisations, there are other institutions run by churches or foundations that provide education for children with SEN in different forms. However, for us dog handlers, this is not relevant for the realisation of our work.

General characteristics of the age group

In general, children with SEN have serious problems in their family and socio-cultural background in addition to the existing organic or biological abnormalities. Many of them are the children of young mothers with many children, who lack parental support, but in the worst cases these children are not even raised by their parents, but by grandparents, guardians or even in state care. By now, it is probably clear to all readers how important and sensitive a period in a child's development is, in addition to pre-school, the years of early schooling and adolescence. Children with SEN are at constant risk of being exposed to the lack of a stable parent/grandparent and inadequate role models, all of which affect their personal development.

Key personality traits:

- self-esteem problems
- severe compensation - usually with extreme patterns of behaviour
- hyperactivity and attention deficit
- damaged self-image
- learned helplessness
- lack of motivation to learn
- impaired social skills and abilities - inability to form lasting human relationships
- distorted view of reality
- poor sense of responsibility - avoidance
- in more severe cases, self-sufficiency problems

The possibilities of dog therapy

It is quite clear that the presence and professional use of the dog in this age group is also justified, as we have many intervention points. Our primary objective must always be the effective development of personality and only secondarily the acquisition of lexical knowledge. With the help of the dog in the lower classes, we have the opportunity to prevent the fixation or development of an incorrect self-image, to improve self-esteem and to stimulate motivation. We have many possibilities, but it should be stressed that a cornerstone of working with this group is regularity. Pupils in the majority of primary schools adapt relatively easily to change and are also good at sensing the passage of time.

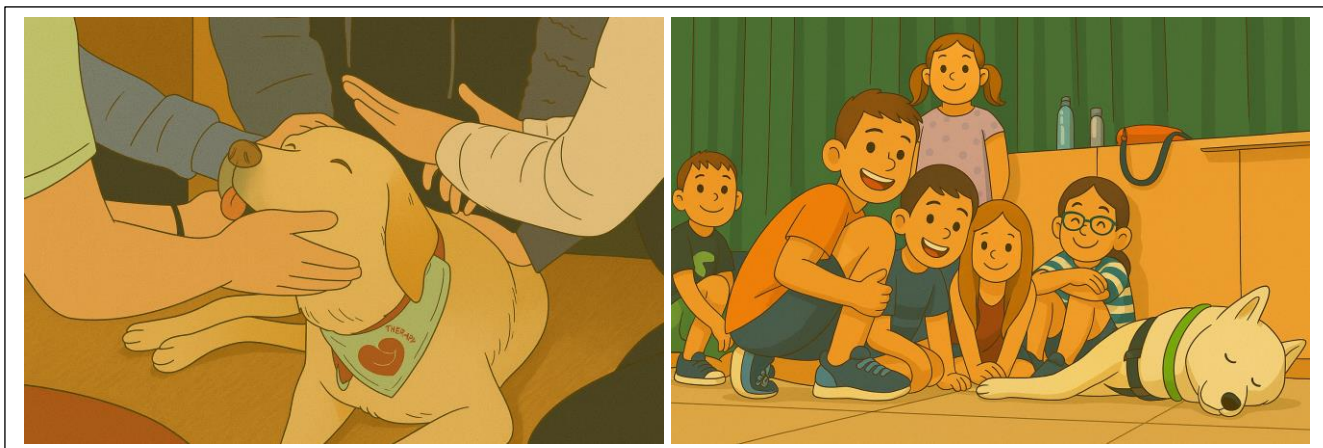
In the case of children with SNI, it is not so significant to reward them later, for example with a dog. For them, immediate feedback and reinforcement is most important, so if you establish a weekly pattern, it is much easier to influence them. Ideally, it is best to organise sessions once a week, or every two weeks at the most, to ensure effective progress.

We can intervene in the same way with older people, with the difference that the main aim is not prevention but effective treatment of the problems that have developed. In older age groups, whether they are majority children or children with SEN, the sense of belonging, the possibility of attachment and selfless love is a very crucial point in their lives and we dog handlers have the

opportunity to create a similar feeling in young people. Every session should be preceded by a very detailed and comprehensive discussion with the class teacher or development teacher. Children with SEN in particular may have a wide range of developmental or behavioural problems, which require professional help from all facility dog handlers to deal with them properly.

These sessions are always led by a special needs teacher, development teacher or other qualified teacher, who should be consulted prior to each session on the objectives to be achieved. It is important to know that the topic of the development session is always determined by the development teacher and the tasks and their implementation should be agreed with the handler. In this case, it is up to the trainer to apply the dog and the way in which it is applied, while the tasks are defined by the teacher. In the same way, it is the teacher's responsibility to handle the children and lead the lesson, while the handler is responsible for helping them to work with the dog.

Of course, working with children, young people and, what is more, with a dog, requires a great deal of flexibility. Some of the planned tasks may not be feasible due to the current state of the children. In such cases, it is important to be able to improvise and manage the children's behaviour appropriately.



Structure of the ASL session for children with special needs

For all ages, it is necessary to find out about children's behaviour and fears before the session. The class teacher will be the biggest help in this. A preliminary telephone conversation or a short personal consultation is necessary to get to know the target group, so that we, the handlers, can be prepared.

ASL sessions are structured along similar lines to those in primary school. However, during the sessions, it makes sense to provide less information and to focus more on the experience. For them, 'dry' facts are less exciting or what we can only talk about is not effective, as their imagination and prior knowledge is very poor.

Introduction

- using greetings - watch children's reactions, if someone is scared, don't force it.
- also pay attention to the right touch - stroking can be clumsy
- a brief introduction
- why the dog may be present, how it differs from any other similar dog
- it is also necessary to warn them not to generalise - if they have been visited by a well-trained, well-behaved white spotted dog, it is not certain that all white spotted dogs are as well-behaved and kind
- explaining the rules when the dog is present - no loud noises, no sudden movements, no hurting the dog, listening to each other and the dog
- exploring prior knowledge - who has a dog at home, what they do with it, etc.

Main part

- learning about the tools of responsible animal husbandry
 - for children in lower grade school(age 7-11), the tools are placed on the table, each child has the opportunity to look at them, touch them - task: the leader names the tool, whoever knows which one it is, takes it and tries it
 - for upper school grade children age (11-14), put it on the table for them to look at, then cover it up - task: guess which instrument they have touched by touching it
 - always emphasise that your dog needs these things and that even if parents at home don't think it's important, they should try to be aware of it
 - all the simplified forms of the game we have learned so far can be used in this group

- good behaviour with dogs
 - behavioural problems are common, so put a lot of emphasis on how they should behave if they see a stray dog, what their options are, etc.
 - love language - how they can look after their dog, what is good for it, how to stroke it, what hurts it, who to go to if it is sick

- a lot of reward games - it is felt that in this age group there is a need to give a lot of information, which can be boring for children overall. Where we can only talk about certain things, it is worthwhile to break up the monotony with a reward game at intervals. Reward games can be a tunnel, a jumping hurdle or a dog massage, or even a petting and reward snack

- for upper grade school children, we have the opportunity to look into the world of assistance dogs, but always be flexible about this, as older children may not be receptive to the topic
 - if you see that children are open-minded, bring short videos, pictures that they can work on in small groups - ask questions and find out what they think about a wheelchair or how they think a dog can help them in their everyday life
 - try to do the same with attitude formation, addressing the issue in an empathetic way and reinforcing in children that they are just as human as we are and may need our help

- for children with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, the tasks are simplified and the organisation of the activities should follow the principles established for the kindergarten age group
 - it is also important to use simple and clear instructions in this age group
 - be flexible and empathetic
 - help the teacher, always try to keep the dog within reach of the children
 - watch the children's reactions, not least the dog's - if you feel uncomfortable, don't force the tasks
 - place a strong emphasis on playfulness and contact with the dog

Conclusion - farewell

- whether it's a learning disabled or intellectually disabled child in primary or secondary school, always take time for appropriate guidance. Give children time to prepare, say goodbye and express their experiences in their own way
- saying goodbye with little ones in primary school is a good way to say goodbye
- one by one, we can ask the talking children to tell us what they liked best, or even summarise what they learned - so we get some feedback on the success of the session
- give them the opportunity to say goodbye to the dog
- the process of saying goodbye can be assisted by picture cards where the child can choose, for example, the emotion of how he or she felt. This depends on the creativity of the teacher and the handler



Competences of the handler and facility dog

Competences of the handler

Whether you are a teacher or a not, you must have the following competences:

- your dog has passed a test, has a valid test
- knowing your own dog
- pedagogical sensitivity, affinity
- love of children
- empathy, acceptance
- flexibility, linguistic flexibility
- ability to cooperate
- accuracy, reliability
- willingness to self-educate
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- active but controlled participation in movement tasks
- barking on cue is the most useful but not obligatory element here, be careful not to scare smaller ones
- likewise, retrieval - can be extremely useful, but is not a necessity
- the dog working with this age group should be the most flexible, as it will encounter the most diverse range of activities
- the dog must remain passive in situations where children are exhibiting extreme behaviour - for example, a child may have a tantrum - the dog should not react negatively and be cautious about making positive approaches to the child, as we do not know how the child will react



Secondary school students

Presentation of the secondary school age group

For young adults, the next stage of their school years is secondary school. Today's young people in Hungary have a wide range of options for continuing their studies, whether it's a specific professional or a school-leaving certificate. At this stage of life, it is also necessary to take into account that there are a number of intervention points that require support and assistance for young people during their studies.

We have collected statistical data on students in Hungarian public education for the school year 2019/20. The figures show the number of students in secondary education in Hungary in this academic year, and the distribution of students who were involved in various problems that may be a focus of child protection.

According to the statistics for the 2019/20 school year, the education of full-time students in upper secondary education took place in 2,243 places of provision. There were 189,000 students in 858 upper secondary schools, 149,000 students in 685 vocational upper secondary schools, 66,000 students in 499 vocational upper secondary schools and 7,000 students in 201 vocational schools/skills schools. Nationally, the total number of pupils in this school year was 411 thousand.

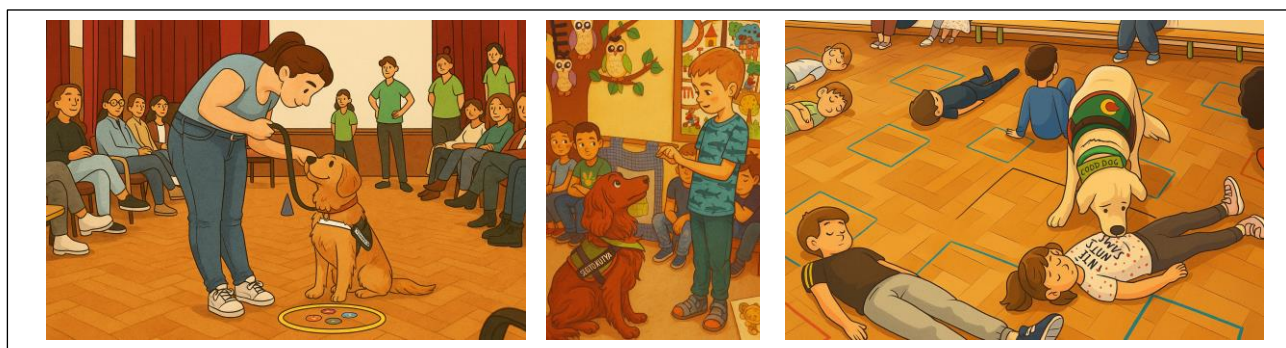
Based on the data of the Early Warning System for the support of pupils at risk of dropping out in KIR (data for the second semester of the school year 2019/20), in secondary schools, upper secondary schools (from 1 September 2020, technical upper secondary schools) and upper secondary vocational schools (from 1 September 2020, vocational upper secondary schools). In 2020, in the 2020/2020 school year, there are 24,000 SEN: pupils with special educational needs (most commonly with severe learning, attention and behaviour difficulties), 17,911 BTMN: pupils with integration, learning and behaviour difficulties, 9,577 repeaters, 9,824 disadvantaged, 10,527 severely disadvantaged, 2,7119 with regular child protection benefits. In total, 98,958 pupils, or almost 100,000 pupils, are affected in secondary education, which is almost a quarter of the total number of pupils.

Secondary school students with disabilities

A review of the data from the Central Statistical Office ("*4.1.1.33. People identifying themselves as disabled by age group and type of disability*", website of the Statistical Office) also shows the changing perception of disability. In 2001, five broad categories are observed: mobility impairment and its variants, sensory impairment: visual, hearing and their groups, speech impairment and intellectual disability. In 2001, a total of 57,7006 persons declared themselves as disabled and 56,9670 did not respond. A comparison of the figures shows that approximately 5.7% of the population had a disability.

In 2022, 273558 of our fellow citizens declared themselves as disabled, which is less than 50% of the number twenty years ago (48.02% to be precise). At the same time, 2812002 people did not respond, which is four times the number recorded in 2001. The most striking difference can be seen in the number of people with reduced mobility, which fell from 225615 in 2001 to 112914 in 2001. Taking into account the fourfold increase in the number of non-respondents, it can be concluded that the reduction in the number of people with disabilities in the statistics does not necessarily reflect the number of people with actual disabilities in Hungary

Of those with disabilities, data for ages 5-14 and 15-29 are aggregated, so there are no exact figures for those in secondary school for ages 14-20. The two age groups in 2011 were approximately 25,000 for ages 5-14 and 45,000 for ages 15-29, with two times as many respondents for younger and three times as many for older ages not responding. It can be concluded from these data that there are approximately twice as many disabled respondents in the secondary school age group compared to the primary school age group. Looking at the figures for 2022, a similar conclusion can be drawn.



Learning characteristics of secondary school students

In lesson planning, the teacher's aim is to transfer the knowledge to be imparted to the young learners in a way that will lead to applicable, active knowledge. The teacher can use different methods in the process of imparting knowledge. There is a wide range of options, from frontal communication to experiential pedagogy using situation simulation. Many factors can influence the effectiveness of the methods used. According to a study by Bánfi and Korom (2022), the majority of the teachers involved in the study consider it important to use methods based on students' active learning processes, but nearly 50% of them still use frontal methods in their daily work. During the timetabled lessons, teachers who want to actively involve students in the learning process encounter difficulties. It was noted that there is a lack of appropriate teaching materials, teaching aids and curricular support. The large size of the groups and the short time available are also raised. The effectiveness of teaching is linked to the learning style of the pupils and the strategies they use. The results of research on this topic will help teachers to decide which methods to use to organise lessons. Mapping different learning strategies and then

comparing learning styles by analysing questionnaires, David Kolb (1984) and Felder and Silvermann (1988) have created learning models with similar content. In 2005, Felder and Brent drew conclusions from these models to propose a learning cycle organisation, the essence of which is:

- Determine how the theory taught is directly related to everyday life, how the student can directly encounter it in everyday life.
- The balance between theory and practice in the teaching process!
- Use visual/visual reinforcement (pictures, drawings, diagrams) to go along with the oral knowledge. If these are not in the textbook, the teacher can create them himself.
- Data should be part of the learning process, as it supports the theory and can be used to draw conclusions.
- Emphasise active, hands-on participation of students in teaching!
- Express your own opinion on the course material.

The effectiveness of the teaching-learning process depends not only on the tools in the teacher's hands, but also on how he or she can capture the interest of the students in the classroom. What are the factors that motivate them to acquire knowledge? The intrinsic motivations that support learning in school are grouped into five broad categories:

- goals, vision
- background (family, friends, classmates)
- learning experience and emotional connection to the process
- self-reflection (self-development)
- recognition, success, praise

The application of the above is a great opportunity for the implementation of the assisted teaching with facility dogs in secondary school classes, so the justification of the presence of dogs in this age group can be absolutely stated.



Structure and characteristics of dog activities in secondary schools

Animal-assisted education takes place in a secondary school class with facility dogs. Trained facility dogs and their handlers can be designed into interactive learning processes where children are in direct contact with the dog. They can experience the joy of touch and the pleasure of controlling the dog themselves with appropriate instructions. The presence of a four-legged friend acts as a strong emotional motivator, as the dog's attachment is similar to that of a human. The dog also acts as a motivational tool, as we have already seen, relieving the young people of the need to perform, as they are motivated to do the task by the dog's selfless love and attention. They do not have to fear being judged by the dog or having an opinion formed about them. They have the opportunity to work for the dog present during a lesson, the reward formula here being tricks with the dog, giving a reward bite or other playful ways.

As always, the key is to consult with teachers, set development goals and establish regularity. For children with SEN, regularity and more frequent meetings are also very important in this age group.

Structure of ASL sessions in secondary schools

The ASL hours are planned according to the following steps:

- compiling knowledge material for dissemination
- identifying the focal points of knowledge
- selecting and designing the teaching methods used and the interactive tasks assisted by the dog on the basis of the outline points
- preparing a presentation to make up for the lack of a textbook
- purchasing and preparing equipment for interactive exercises
- obtaining information about the site

The design also had to take into account the following:

- interactive exercises are feasible for large class sizes (30-36 students)
- 45-minute single lessons or 90-minute blended lessons
- to plan an active, experiential lesson, it is worth using several methods in parallel, if possible
- the need to simplify tasks as much as possible,
- preparing the design, collecting demonstration materials,
- the specific needs of the venue - whether projection is possible

Introduction

- The introduction gives us the opportunity to talk in more depth about
 - how a dog becomes a facility dog or other assistance dog
 - how to become an facility dog handler
 - what health conditions they must meet
 - what target groups we work with
 - what makes the method effective
- It is necessary to overcome initial shyness and anxiety, so it is worth telling about the dog present and asking questions about the dogs to the group present - this will also help to explore prior knowledge
- It's important to know that the older children get, the less they like to act - with a few exceptions. So let's not wait for volunteers, but avoid the awkward moments that come with it. Ask our dog present to "pick someone". This can be done by sitting him down in front of someone (it's a good idea to use a hand signal, which is less obvious and really makes it look like the dog has chosen), or even sending the dog out among the children and seeing who he stops for more than a few moments and declares that he has chosen him.
- However, there may be young people present who want to be too involved and overwhelm those around them. In such cases, try to manage the situation appropriately and actively involve the rest of the group
- Ask a lot of questions about the assistance dogs, about the injured people around you, so that you can assess the direction you can take in the future, how inclusive the group is
- It's important to know that the members of this group already have a strong sense of self and a strong vision of the world. In this group, it is already worth treating them as partners and giving them as many opportunities as possible for self-expression and self-fulfilment. Our task as leaders is to build trust and support from behind the scenes, so let's try to build this

Main part

- In this age group, we can put more emphasis on shaping attitudes.
 - pictures to show the types of disabilities
 - where the assistance dogs appear
 - what a dog can do to help
 - be careful when discussing depression and anxiety, as some young people may become self-aware in the process
 - help to create a positive experience through live demonstration, even through first-hand experience - with a well-trained assistance dog, he can see for himself how the dog performs the tasks.

- If possible, we can also invite a person with a support dog to participate, bringing them even closer together.
 - Let's move on to autism, making the condition visible - many people with autism are unaware that they have social anxiety, but a well-trained service dog can help. Demonstrate an exercise called "deep pressure therapy", where the dog lies on its owner's legs or puts its head on the lap to calm and relieve anxiety
- We have the opportunity to talk about dog communication in more depth, with pictures, video analysis
 - You can get a deeper insight into shelter life, the importance of adoption and the dangers of breeding. Highlight the importance and necessity of neutering
 - Before choosing a career, show them the helping professional as an option or even the possibilities of dog training
 - The realisation of these themes depends only on the creativity of the handler
 - you can take different video recordings, analyse in small groups and reward the correct answers or those who do well with a group trick (jumping obstacle or tunnel).
 - we can categorise the dog's signals, which picture belongs to the positive and which to the negative signals
 - bring a short educational text on the importance of adoption, which they can also work on in small groups. Make a thought map and present it to the class, the dog will of course be an integral part of the check, barking and rewarding with a high five if they have done their job correctly.

Again, it is important to stress that the topic is always determined by the state and knowledge of the group, which needs to be adapted even on the fly. Take into account the sensitivity or motivation of the people present. Don't be afraid to play a quick game with the dog to help the children's behaviour.



Conclusion - farewell

- give young people the opportunity to express themselves individually, telling the dog only how they felt, what they learned, etc.
- You can give them small sheets of paper on which they can write down their experiences, thoughts and wishes anonymously, which they can put in a pocket on the dog's harness - and the dog walker promises to read it to their four-legged companion at home.
- It is also important to note that young people often come to ask questions after the session has ended. We should also pay attention to this and give them the opportunity to express their thoughts without being heard. Often they just need someone to listen, but if we have given them a really exciting session, they may have had a thought pop into their head, which could be about their pet dog, their plans for the future or anything they need reassurance or advice about.

Facility dogs are a type of assistance dog. The student will have an enjoyable experience of working with assistance dogs. Facility dogs are taught tricks that are part of the service of other types of assistance dogs. This may include picking up and passing various objects that have been dropped, which is also the work of a disabled assistance dog. One of the important tasks of an autistic assistance dog is to soothe its owner by leaning on the owner's leg with its front two paws. This can also be demonstrated by a trained facility dog.



Competences of the handler and facility dog

Competences of the handler

The handler, whether a teacher or a not, must have the following competences:

- your dog has passed a test, has a valid test
- knowing your own dog
- pedagogical sensitivity, affinity
- love of children
- empathy, acceptance
- flexibility, linguistic flexibility
- ability to cooperate
- accuracy, reliability
- willingness to self-educate
- continuously training your facility dog, keeping his/her knowledge up to date, teaching new tricks and situations
- basic knowledge of dog communication
- basic knowledge about assistance dogs
- basic knowledge of the different types of disability and their characteristics

Competences of the facility dog:

- passed the examination, is licensed with his/her driver
- calm, balanced, well controlled
- affectionate but not intrusive, but able to open up to children on his/her own when necessary
- be able to perform certain assistance dog tasks - not just with the handler
- active but controlled participation in movement tasks
- barking on cue is the most useful but not obligatory element here, be careful not to scare smaller ones
- likewise, retrieval - can be extremely useful, but is not a necessity
- the dog working with this age group should be the most flexible, as it will encounter the most diverse range of activities
- the dog must remain passive in situations where children are exhibiting extreme behaviour - for example, a child may have a tantrum - the dog should not react negatively and be cautious about making positive approaches to the child, as we do not know how the child will react



Life in everyday life with an facility dog

After reading this handbook, we trust that one key point will come to everyone's mind, and that is the welfare of the dog. Very little has been written about this segment, so in this chapter we would like to explore the subject.

The question may arise as to where and how the welfare of the companion animal could be compromised in such work, or why it is important to do so. But this is a crucial point of the work, because wherever we look at it, our dog is an integral part of the process, without whom it would not be possible, and it is therefore our duty to put his needs and wants first.

Ideally, the person who has this book in their hands already has a dog of the right breed, or is in contact with a professional who can help them choose the right dog for their needs. The selection and suitability of the dog is the cornerstone of a successful future. The trainers at our foundation do not stick to one breed of dog, as any dog can be suitable for the job, as long as it has the right temperament and behaviour. We often work with mixed breeds and dogs who have previously lived in the shelter. Of course, in all cases we need to test them thoroughly to see if they are suitable for the job.

Every dog has a basic need:

agile dogs will need an active break from work to let off some steam. A good place to do this is

- the agility training
- a hoops
- a mantrailing
- flyball
- other sports

passive rest is vital for dogs of all characters

- in room kennels
- in complete tranquillity
- the amount of rest depends on the load and workload

In any case, pay attention to your dog's signals, because a well-trained dog lives for its owner, some dogs can work indefinitely. Therefore, in all cases, the owner should know when his dog is getting mentally tired. Every dog is unique, some dogs can be worked with every two days, others only twice a week. Respect this, as the work of a service dog is very different to that of a pet. They are subjected to a significantly higher workload and therefore stress throughout their lives. To prevent stress-related illnesses or premature retirement, we need to know how to relieve stress in our dogs and how much work they can do in a week. The biggest help in this is our Foundation's experienced trainers, who have trained, employed and retired many facility dogs, so they have a wealth of experience in how to achieve the goal of helping our fellow human beings while keeping the well-being of our dogs in mind.

It is therefore important to be aware of the negative effects of "overworking" your dog:

other physical symptoms caused by passive stress

- allergies
- inflammatory processes in the body (e.g.: ear)
- recurrent diarrhoea
- hair loss, changes in hair quality
- other symptoms

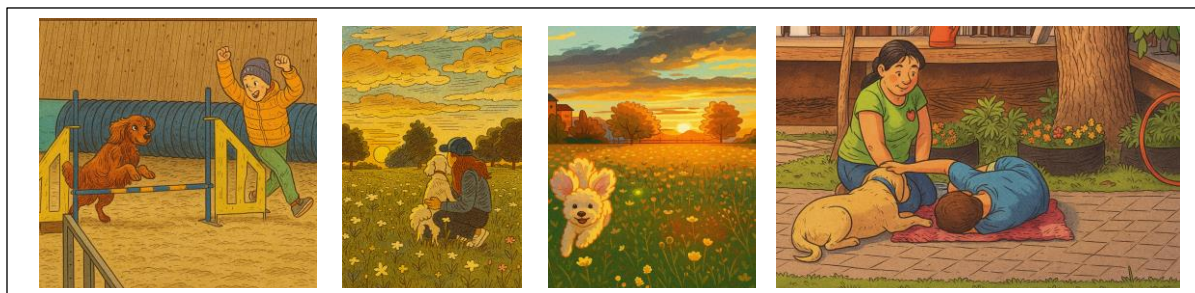
changes in workload

- slower task execution
- repeated sleep, enervated state
- extreme behavioural changes in certain situations: growling, snarling, hyperactivity

If symptoms are noticed, in addition to immediate veterinary help, it is necessary to remove the source of stress and give the dog time to recover. In such cases, it is worth contacting the training organisation and planning for the dog's recovery period after the illness. Although symptoms may occur, it is not necessary to take the dog off work forever, ideally they should be able to return to work after rehabilitation. From that point on, much more attention should be paid to the dog's behaviour, cues and the balance of active rest and exercise.

Overall, then, we have to consider that while empathy and acceptance for our fellow human beings permeates our work, the same attitude towards our dogs is just as essential. In all cases, it is the responsibility of the owner/handler to first and foremost monitor the work of their dog and, if necessary, react, find solutions and intervene during the development session. All this is to ensure that your dog is able to help you in this professional for as long as possible.

Our aim is to help other people, but we must remember that we work with people and animals. We operate in a fragile, sensitive system where resilience and understanding are crucial. We trust that what you have read here will help both dog and owner to build a quality relationship and to provide a professional service in their work.



GENERAL INFORMATION

When do we offer ASL lessons in an institution

- If you are expected to visit a children's group only once. Usually around World Animal Day, Children's Day, school events and summer camps.
- When introducing regular dog-assisted activities in a group of children, we recommend the first introductory lesson.

Technical preparation for the lesson:

- **Always ask the person responsible to send their request by email!** Please provide the following information:
 - the exact location
 - the ages of the children
 - the number of participants
 - the desired date
- **Our reply will include**
 - the exact date – year, month, day, hour, minute
 - the exact duration of the session
 - the requested layout of the room
 - a brief summary of our program
 - our equipment requirements, if any

Example:

Dear!

Thank you for your enquiry.

We can make the following offer :

Supplier: *With dogs for a smile Foundation*

Offer: *20.. year...month...day...hour...pedc Interactive activity with dogs for 1 group of kindergarten children in the middle group in kindergarten.*

The session is led by a facility dog and its handler with the help of the kindergarten teachers.

During the session, children can learn about the needs of dogs in a playful way, get a taste of the rules of responsible pet ownership, play dog games together, and all children can safely come into direct contact with the dog. We pay special attention to children who are afraid of dogs.

(if you have a child with severe dog hair allergies, please let us know)

Please arrange chairs or benches in a U-shape around in the classroom or gym for the

children, if possible, leaving as much space as possible in the middle of the room. The Foundation will provide the necessary equipment for the session.

- always ask for feedback !
- the date and number of children should be agreed precisely.
- Always ask whether the children have parental consent to participate in the activity and for photos to be taken – this should be obtained by the institutions.
- Ask the institution to send a reminder (by phone or email) a few days before the program.

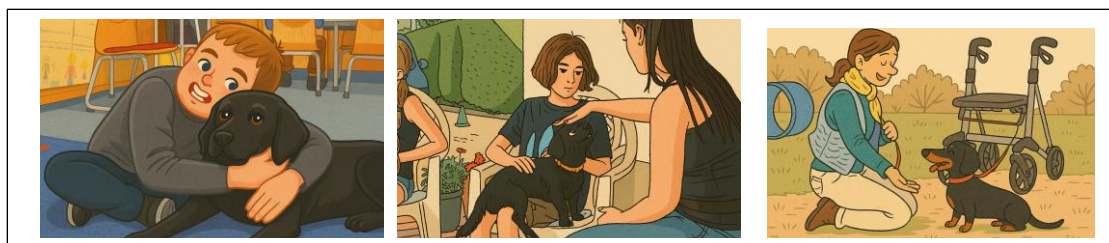


IMPORTANT ground rules to follow

- The dog enters the room when the children are sitting in their seats in the prepared area, waiting quietly for him.
- Always bring the dog into the classroom on a lead, as there are usually at least 1-2 children in each group who are afraid or fearful of the dog. An unleashed dog can also trigger fear and bad experiences.
- The class starts with an introduction and a demonstration to make sure that the dog is obedient, gentle, kind and not to be feared. An excellent way to do this is to teach the children the command words and then introduce them to the dog (feet, sit, down, lie, stay, to me, tricks) Only then go around for a greeting pat or, in small groups, invite the children to the dog for a greeting and direct contact with the dog.
- During the greeting process, it is easy to see which children are afraid of the dog, and pay special attention to them during the rest of the session so as not to expose them to unnecessary bad experiences. Do not force him to participate in physical contact games or to pet the dog. Usually, these children will loosen up by the end of the lesson and, seeing the joy of the others, he will join in the games.
- Every child, even the shy or fearless child, should have the opportunity to have a positive experience in the session. Example. For younger children, even hold their hand and run with them to send the dog through the tunnel.

But you can give him other opportunities where he can experience a sense of achievement without direct dog contact. For example, throw the ball but we ask the dog to fetch it, or put a grain of food in the dog's bowl and feed the dog, etc.

- At the end of the lesson, when the children say goodbye, they sit in their seats and we lead the dog in front of them. Let them pet him and give a short reflection on the lesson. What they liked or disliked or say something nice to the dog. Make sure it's a steady slow walk, don't get stuck on one child so that the others don't get bored and the order doesn't break down, but listen to what each child has to say.
- Please ask the children to stay in their seats while we pack, dress and leave. We will leave the room as we came in, with the children in their seats. This avoids the children rushing the dog for a final "goodbye", which is no longer desirable for our presumably tired dog.



Acknowledgements

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We would like to thank our four-legged companions, who serve us with unconditional love, immeasurable work ethic, and a desire to please.

We would like to thank the teachers who are open to new opportunities to provide experience-based, useful knowledge and skills to the children entrusted to them.



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Evaluation, comments

Thank you for reading the manual. If you have reached this point and have 2 minutes to spare, please click on the link and tell us what you think about the manual. Thank you!

<https://forms.gle/FQ2N3fhKJ6sQE8K7>

Attachment:

Lesson plans:



1. ASL
Kindergarten.pdf



1.1. ASL-SEN
kindergarten.pdf



2. ASL lower
elementary school .pc



3. upper elementary
school.pdf



4. ASL High
school.pdf

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