

Why Use a Support Dog?

Approximately 25% of UK households own a dog
(Statista, 2019).

88% of dog owners say that they feel their companion enhances their lives
(Statista, 2019).

93% of dog owners state that owning their companion makes them happy
(Statista, 2019).

Support dog-based activities enhance the quality of life for autistic children through educational, recreational and therapeutic means

(O'Haire, 2017; Kelly & Cozzolino, 2015; Nordgren & Engström, 2012).

There is supportive evidence proving that support animals have encouraged children with autism to vocally communicate

(Nimer and Lundahl, 2007; Sams, *et.al.* 2006; Levinson, 1969).



(Anderson, 2020)

All support dogs are fully trained and qualified through Support Dogs UK (2020). The trained dogs welfare has been accommodated throughout the training and allocating process. Support dog owners are protected through the Equality Act (2010).
(Support Dogs UK, 2020)

An Assistance Dogs UK (2015) booklet with personalised information about the training organisation and the support dog is supplied to the client/caregiver, showing proof of IGDF or ADI accredited organisational training.
(Assistance Dogs UK, 2015).



(IGDF, 2021)



(NCC, 2021) (Canine Partners, 2021)



Autism Support Dogs



(Support Dogs, 2020)

For the use of practitioners in support of enabling autistic children to communicate through a therapy dog

Note to Practitioner:

- Please ensure that the child's parent or guardian is kept up to date with progress and has proper induction training.
- It is important to check whether the child has fears of dogs or allergies before introducing the support dog.
- The support dog must be up to date with flea treatments and immunisations.
- Religious awareness must also be adhered to, as not all cultures allow dogs to be used as companions.
- Not just any dog can be used as support, always get in touch with professional accredited bodies. Details are stated in this leaflet.



(Angelsense, 2021)

There are numerous benefits from animal-assisted activities that can enhance the quality of life of children with autism. Support dogs can be taken into the home and school environments to provide comfort and therapeutic benefits such as, combatting loneliness, aiding confidence and creating a strong sense of companionship. (Pet Partners, 2020; O'Haire, 2017; Kelly & Cozzolino, 2015; Nordgren & Engström, 2012)



(Abqtodo, 2021)



(Perfect Pawtions, 2020)

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH Support Dogs UK

Open Monday to Friday
8.30am – 4.30pm

Phone: 0114 261 7800

Website: www.supportdogs.org.uk

Address:

21 Jessops Riverside,
Brightside Lane,
Sheffield,
S9 2RX.

This leaflet is available in Welsh, Large Font, Non-colour or Braille format. Please do not hesitate to request any of the above alternative copies.

Rationale

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide a simple source of information on the chosen communication tool of ‘Support Dogs’ for practitioners, including sign-posting as to where to access and obtain Support Dogs from. This focuses on the demographic of children with Autism and enables the practitioner to decide whether a Support Dog would be suitable for their client.

Dogs have coexisted with humans for many years and have been extensively bred to do so (Riemer, 2017; Parker *et al.*, 2010; Turner, 2007; Topál *et al.*, 2005). They serve many purposes and have their own roles in humanity’s cohabited lives such as, protection, becoming companions, hunting and herding (McCune *et al.*, 2014; Dotson & Hyatt, 2008; Turner, 2007; Morey, 1994). Consistently through the years humans have adapted anthropomorphic behaviour; Epley *et al.* (2007) states that anthropomorphism ‘instils real or imagined behaviour of nonhuman agents with humanlike characteristics, motivations, intentions or emotions’. Fine & Eisen (2016) advocate that anthropomorphic behaviour may explain more about human needs and the connection animals can make with humanity.

History shows within the 19th century there was an occurrence of animals being used as pets in some UK mental institutes (Glenk, 2017; Gordon, 2017; Beetz, 2012; O’Callaghan & Chandler, 2011). This was inspired through the work of John Locke (1699) who suggested that to encourage responsibility and ‘affectionate feelings towards others’ children need animals to be responsible for. An example of the companionship between humans and animals was apparent in Bethlem Hospital, as patients would share their distresses with dogs, while nobody was around to hear (Monfort, Montolio & Sancho-Pelluz, 2019; Allderidge, 1991; Connolly, 1847). Later in the 19th century, child psychologist Boris Levison (1969) coined the term ‘Pet Therapy’ as he accidentally discovered one of his non-verbal patients speaking to his dog within their therapy session. Levison had revealed the therapeutic benefits of using a dog as an implementor to ignite communication between therapists and their patients (Shim & Woo, 2020; Fine, 2016; Levinson, 1984, 1969).

The effects of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) were studied over the course of a year, by a psychiatric social worker within a United States psychiatric hospital in 1987 (Wilson, 1991; Kidd & Kidd, 1987; Netting *et al.*, 1987). A group who received AAT showed a 50% decrease in medication in comparison to the group that did not receive AAT. Eight suicide attempts were shown from the data of the ward with no AAT, the ward with AAT had none (Galt, 2007; Lee 1987). Animals can reduce the influence of psychosocial stress by attracting and holding human attention through attachment theory (Meehan *et al.*, 2017; McCune *et al.*, 2014; O'Haire, *et al.*, 2015; Heinrichs, *et al.*, 2003). The images used in the leaflet show different autistic children being fully engaged and utilising their SD as different forms of comfort, friendship, sensory aid, as a listening aid and a reading partner. The image with the little girl whispering in her SD ear is a perfect example of how the SD can encourage mute children to talk (Brooks *et al.*, 2018; Purewal *et al.*, 2017; Bystrom & Persson, 2015; O'Haire, 2013). These images create a specific visual stimulus for the reader, to visualise the benefits of SD for autistic children rather than just natural reader assumption (O'Donohoe & Eilish, 2007; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Mitchell, 1994). The happiness the children show is a clear indicator of the comfort they feel with their SD, the images enable the reader to empathize and feel that SD are having a positive impact (Grecucci *et al.*, 2019; Schlochtermeyer *et al.*, 2013; Nanda *et al.*, 2012; Caramazza, 1996). If the leaflet was to only contain text, the practitioner may not feel as engaged with the message that the leaflet is trying to portray (Lara-Rallo, 2009; Roecker, 2005; Mukherjee, 2002; Paller, 1995).

Support Dogs (2020) have been used as a tool for anxiety relief, improving physical wellbeing, to help tackle social isolation and enable confidence. Support Dogs (SD) make a difference for children with autism by keeping the child safe when out, including when crossing roads (Burgoyne *et al.*, 2014). SD help teach children to learn how to take turns and share through playing games (Anderson & Olson, 2006). They reduce family stress and help overcome fears (Geist, 2011). SD also help autistic children with different sensory needs, due to the pressure of the SD head resting on an anxious child's lap; this has a calming effect (London *et al.*, 2020).

However, some possible implications must be considered. Some public establishments do not allow animals to enter although, the SD owner is protected under legislation (*Equality Act 2010*) which states that ‘reasonable arrangements must be made to accommodate an assistance animal’. The SD must be vet checked, properly trained and de-fleaded as the animal must be safe around the child (SupportDogs, 2020). UK legislation (*Dangerous Dogs Act 1991*) indicates that dogs ‘must be kept under proper control, and the responsibility of dogs around minors lies upon the head of the household’. Studies from around the world indicate that children are the most common victims to dog bites (Schalamon, 2006; Lakestani *et al.*, 2005; Kahn *et al.*, 2003; Millot & Filiatre, 1986). Utilising an ill-trained dog could lead to snappy behaviour, frightening the child or causing injury (Murphy, 2018; Younggren *et al.*, 2016; Armstrong & Botzler, 2003). Both of which could create a traumatic effect on the child causing more problems rather than solving them (Anyfantakis *et al.*, 2009; Peters *et al.*, 2004; Rossman *et al.*, 1997; Gislason & Call, 1982).

Religious views also must be considered when allocating a SD to a family. Under Islam, dogs are not usually considered as pets and many Sunni and Shi'a Muslim jurists view them as ritually unclean (Schoenfeld-Tacher *et al.*, 2017; Armstrong & Botzler, 2016; Kermerer, 2012; Khaled, 2004). This compared to Hinduism where dogs are considered sacred beings, which are celebrated and considered the guardians of heaven (Dahal, 2020; Ananthaswamy, 2013; Good, 2003; Sax, 1994).

The content of the leaflet aims to provide a practitioner with the appropriate guidance for allocating an autistic child a SD. This leaflet would be suitable for health care professionals of many fields and would benefit being available in hospital and G.P surgery staff rooms. They could even be provided at request with demonstrations and attendance of the SD themselves.

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