FOOTSTEPS CANINE CHRONICLES

THE STORYTELLER

CHAPTER - 1



Resource Pack

Understanding My Big Feelings

Big feelings are a normal part of life, and learning to understand and manage them can help us feel safe, calm, and ready to cope.

Have you experienced any of this?



Being left alone for a short time



Others invading your space



Being around lots of loud sounds



Being in an unfamiliar place

When these happen, you might feel



Angry



Sad



Worried



Scared

These feelings are big and can be overwhelming.
It's okay to feel that way!
You don't have to rush into making your feelings go away fast.



Instead you can:



Take a breath



Have some quiet time



Ask for help



Ask for someone to stay with you



Take your time



Big feelings are a normal part of life.
Learning to notice what we are feeling can help us understand what might be happening and what support could help.

How are you feeling today?
Point at the picture to let someone know.

BLUE ZONE

- Tired
- Sick
- In pain
- Sad
- Bored



GREEN ZONE

- Calm
- Happy
- Ready
- Comfortable
- Focused



ORANGE ZONE

- Confused
- Worried
- Stressed
- Silly
- Anxious



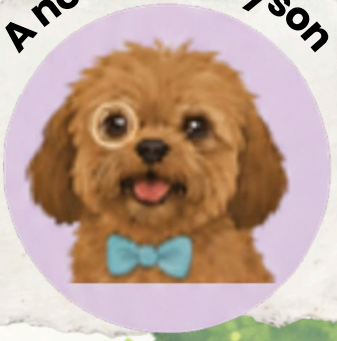
RED ZONE

- Upset
- Overwhelmed
- Angry
- Scared
- Frustrated



No feeling is bad!
All feelings are okay. Feelings help us understand what is happening inside us. The colour zones can help us name our feelings and think about what we need.

A note from Tyson



Sometimes Staying is Enough

When you have big feelings or difficult times, someone staying with you is a big help. Even if there are no words, sitting in silence and knowing that you are safe with someone beside you may be a big help.

I remember when I was scared because my hooman went out to get groceries and I was left at home.



But Paddy was there! No barks or anything, he just quietly sat with me and I felt better and safe with him.



How about you?

Can you think of a time when somebody stayed with you and that helped you feel better? Tell us about it! Use the space below to draw or write about your experience.

What Helps Me When I'm Having a Hard Time?

Having someone stay with you during difficult times and emotions is great! Sometimes, there are other things you might need to help you feel better.

Chefs

Meet the chefs! They are the ones who make me feel better when I am feeling sad, angry, or overwhelmed.



Neville
Contact: Call for a listening ear



Tyson
Contact: Call for comfort



Paddy
Contact: Call for quiet company

Specials

They are just so special, they make me feel better!



Hug me



Play music



Listen to me



Let me be quiet



Help me solve it



Give warm water



Give me choices



Stay with me



This is ***My Support Menu***.
It helps me show others who I want to be with or what I like to do when I'm having a difficult time.



How about you? Tell me about the things that help you when you have a hard time.

Use this page to make your own Support Menu. (Yes, you can copy some of mine!)

Here is your own Support Menu!
Some of the spaces are already filled in for you.
The blank spaces are for you to fill in.

Chefs

They are the ones who make me feel better when I am feeling sad, angry, or overwhelmed.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Specials

They are just so special, they make me feel better!

- ✓ Give me choices
- ✓ Listen to me
- ✓ Stay with me
- ✓ Give me space
- ✓ _____
- ✓ _____
- ✓ _____
- ✓ _____

Today I would like…

_____

_____

_____

_____

Support Cards

Cut out the cards and keep the ones that feel helpful to you. You can show this to a trusted person when you want to ask for support during difficult times.



Talk to me

I'm ready to listen and talk.



Sit with me

You can sit with me quietly.



Just stay

You don't have to fix it. Just be here.



Give me a hug

A hug would help me feel safe.



Let me be quiet

I don't feel like talking right now.



I need some space

Please give me some quiet time.



Help me solve it

I'm ready to work on the problem together.



Check on me later

I need some time first.

This is a space you can fill in before cutting. Put in the things that will help you feel better.

Helping Without Fixing

Watching a child suffer or have difficult moments can be distressing for the people who care about them. This can make us want to step in and fix things when they are struggling.

Support can sometimes look different.

Supporting your child doesn't always mean fixing their problems for them. Support can also look like:

- Creating a space for them
- Letting them find their own way forward if possible
- Making them feel heard, understood, and less alone

What happens when we always try to fix things for them?

- We may reduce opportunities for them to work through difficulties and develop their own skills
- We make it about ourselves (our way, our solution, our comfort)
- We might create distance when they don't want to share anymore



When children share, they want you to listen. They don't always want solutions right away or at all. Sometimes your presence may be what they need most.

What else can we do to support them without always fixing their problems for them?

Listen intently

The foundation of good support is active listening. This means that you should be fully present in the conversation. Listen intently without rehearsing what you'll say next in your mind.

Be present

Instead of giving them a lot of solutions, try just being present. Instead of saying ***"Have you tried this?"***, start with ***"This sounds really hard. I'm here with you."***

Stay curious

Even if you feel like you really know the solution, pause and be more curious. Ask them to tell you more or what would help. This can also help the child understand their emotions and plan what they want to do next.

Validation

Avoid minimising their experiences or difficulties. Instead, acknowledge and validate that what they are going through is overwhelming for them and your presence helps.

Sharing your input if they ask

Gently say your insights when they ask for it. Remember, you should not assume that your insights are always correct for them. Let them have a choice. ***("You might consider...")***

Here are some sample situations and scripts that might help.

What's happening?	My first instinct	What might help without fixing?
The child is crying because their favourite activity has ended.	"Come on, cheer up. We can do something else."	"That was really hard to stop. I'll stay with you."
My child is frustrated because they cannot complete something.	"Let me do it for you."	"Would you like help, or do you want to try by yourself?"
My child says, "Go away!" while upset.	"You need to talk to me about what happened."	"Okay. I'll give you some space. I'll be nearby when you're ready."
My child is overwhelmed and not answering me.	"Why aren't you talking to me?"	Sit nearby, reduce questions, and give them time.

When a child is having a hard time, the words we use can help them feel safe, understood, and supported. Here is a list of scripts you can use to support your child when they are overwhelmed.

When I want my child to know I'm here

"I'm here with you."

"You're not alone."

"I'm here when you're ready."

When I want to give them space

"I'll give you some quiet time."

"You don't have to talk yet."

"I'll be nearby if you need me."

When I want to acknowledge their feelings

"That feels really hard."

"It's okay to feel upset."

"That was a lot to deal with."

When I want to offer help without taking over

"What would feel helpful right now?"

"Would you like some help?"

"Do you want me to stay or give you space?"

Notice the Clues, then Check

Sometimes, children need to have their own space to feel better. It might be difficult to notice this at first and there is always the risk of assuming what they need which can further add to children's difficulties.

Notice. Don't assume. Ask. Offer choices. Listen. Respect their choice. Provide the preferred support.

These are the core steps in ensuring we can support children without taking away their autonomy.

Noticing

Some clues are said through words:



Sometimes, clues are not said through words but through actions:



If you see changes in their actions, your first instinct might be to solve the cause of the behaviours. It is important not to assume always. If there are changes, pause and ask the child if they need your help or how you can help them.

Asking and Offering Choices

Every child has their own preference for support. Some would like you to stay with them, get your insights, or be left alone. Their preferences can also change from time to time.

When offering choices, use clear, simple language. A visual support such as their Support Menu or Support Cards can also be used. If possible, limit the choices to 2 at a time to avoid overwhelm.



Respecting their choices and providing the preferred support



If the child chooses for you to stay without talking, remain nearby without feeling that you need to fill the silence. Your calm presence may be helpful while still allowing the child to decide when, or whether, they want to communicate.

If they choose to be alone, it is also important to respect their choice while ensuring that they are safe by themselves.

Let's see these principles in action with an example. **Jay**, our dogs' favourite person, notices a few things before deciding how to respond.





Scenario
It is a busy school morning, and a child is asked to stop playing and get ready for school. The child becomes quiet, looks down, and says, "Leave me alone." Jay notices the change and pauses before responding, taking a moment to consider what might be happening and what the child may be communicating.

What did Jay notice? (What was happening before?)

The child was asked to stop playing and get ready for school. She became quiet, looked down, and said, "Leave me alone."

What is Jay assuming they need?
(What was Jay's instinct telling him?)

Jay assumed she needed him to talk to her and help her with her before school routine. Jay paused and considered what she might actually need, before asking her. He can use the child's Support Menu to help the child tell him what she needs.

What did the child actually ask for?
(What is the child really telling you?)

The child asked for some space and a little more time before getting ready and did not ask for Jay's advice or help aside from giving her a moment to be alone.

How can Jay respond? (Now that he knows better, what should Jay do?)

Jay can give her space while staying nearby as he waits for the child to be ready for school. Sometimes, staying is enough.

This activity helps us pause, notice, and listen before we respond. Work through each question and write a short note in the boxes. There are no right or wrong answers!

What did I notice?
(What was happening before?)

What am I assuming they need? (What is my instinct telling me?)

What did the child actually ask for? (What are they telling you?)

How can I respond?
(Now that I know better, what should I do?)

Gentle Reminder for Support

Sometimes, we tend to give in to our first instinct.
That's alright! It could take time and practise.



Notice: Pause and see what is happening.



Ask and offer choices: Ask the child if they need you or any support.



Respect their choices: Follow the child's lead on what they need.



Provide support: Provide their preferred support while staying available for them.

The Safe Silence Activity

Sometimes support does not need words. Being quietly present can help a child feel safe and connected without asking questions, giving advice, or trying to fix what they are feeling.

Why is Safe Silence Helpful?

Quietly staying with the child can:

- Help the child feel safe, supported, and not alone
- Give them time and space to settle
- Reduce the pressure to talk, explain, or respond
- Show the child that their feelings do not need to be fixed straight away
- Give the child more choice and control over when and how they communicate
- Build connection through calm presence, even without conversation

Sit. **Breathe.** **Stay Available.**

- **Sit** – Stay nearby and relaxed.
- **Breathe** – Keep your breathing slow and calm.
- **Be quiet** – No questions, advice, or problem-solving.
- **Be aware** – Notice the child's cues without staring or expecting a response.
- **Stay available** – Let the child know you are there if they need you.

Am I Supporting or Rescuing?

Our role is not always to make things easier, remove discomfort, or solve problems for the person we support. Sometimes, in our effort to help, we may unintentionally do too much, make too many decisions for them, or step in too quickly.

Support can look like

- Working with the person
- Respecting their autonomy
- Offering choices
- Helping them build their own skills and confidence

When does rescuing happen?

- When we take over
- Speak for the person
- Remove every challenge
- Assume we know what is best without consulting the person

Is rescuing bad?
Seeing a child struggle can make us want to step in and fix things for them. While support is important, we also want to build their skills, confidence, and independence.

Pause and ask: Is this support building capacity and connection, or creating dependence and reducing choice?

Reflection Activity

Did I...

- Ask what the person wanted before deciding what they needed?
- Give choices rather than making the decision for them?
- Allow time for the person to respond or try?
- Offer support without taking over?
- Listen to their communication, including non-verbal?
- Leave room for the person to experience manageable frustration, uncertainty, or discomfort?
- Step in because support was genuinely needed, or because I felt uncomfortable seeing them struggle?
- Help the person build skills, confidence, or independence?
- Respect their right to say no, change their mind, or ask for space?

