FOOTSTEPS CANINE CHRONICLES

THE STORYTELLER

CHAPTER - 1



Resource Pack

Understanding My Big Feelings

Everyone experiences big feelings sometimes. They aren't something to be ashamed of or afraid of. Your feelings can give you clues about what's happening and what you might need.

You don't have to push your feelings away or figure everything out straight away. Taking a moment to notice what you're feeling can help you understand yourself and decide what might help.

Have you experienced any of this?



Being in a new place



Having conflict with your friends



Getting confused with the changes happening



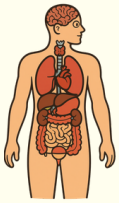
Dealing with a lot of schoolwork

When these happen, you might feel :

- Hurt
- Sad
- Anxious
- Angry
- Overwhelmed

These are just some big feelings you might feel when something happens. Sometimes, you might feel more than one feeling at once.

What happens when you have big feelings?



Body

You might experience fast heartbeats, tense muscles, feel hot, shaky, tired, or sick.



Thoughts

Your thoughts might be fast, stuck, confused, or hard to organise.



Actions

You might want to be quiet, cry, shout at someone, avoid people, or be alone.



Communication

You might find it hard to explain what is wrong, answer questions, or ask for help.



Big feelings are a normal part of life. It's okay if your feelings feel overwhelming sometimes; you don't have to handle everything perfectly. Feelings can change, even when they feel really intense in the moment.

There are many ways that can help when you have difficult feelings.
It varies per person, but here are some things you can try that might help





Take a break



Take a breath



Have some quiet time



Ask someone you trust to stay with you



Ask for help with a problem

Think of a time when you had big feelings. Tell us about it and let's plan what you can do next time!



What happened that led to big feelings?

What feeling/s showed up?

What did you notice in your body or thoughts?

What did you want to do when you felt those feelings?

What did you need at that time?

- ☐ Space
- ☐ Help
- ☐ More time
- ☐ Someone's presence
- ☐ Comfort
- ☐ Something else

If big feelings happen again, what do you think can help you?

Sometimes Staying is Enough

Have you ever felt better when you are with a person you trust?





Sometimes, having someone or being there may be enough.

There may be people you want to be around, especially during difficult moments. There may be times when simply being with them, even without speaking, can help you feel better or safer.

Maybe what we need is for someone to be around.



Sometimes, we have big feelings but we don't want to talk about it yet or get advice from others. Sometimes, we just want someone to be there.

Maybe even when we support our friends. There could be times when being there may help even without saying many words.

How about you?

Who helps you feel better when you are overwhelmed? List down people who make you feel better on the space below.

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

Having a trusted person beside you through difficult times might help you feel better. However, there are some moments when a different support or being alone may be more helpful.

Here are some things you can put in your "Support Toolbox" to help you through difficult times:

With Another Person

- Just stay with me
- Talk to me
- Listen to me

For Comfort

- Give me a hug or a pat on the shoulder
- Reassure me
- Help me feel safe

Space and Alone Time

- Give me some alone time
- Let me be quiet
- Give me time before checking in

Practical Help

- Help me make a plan to solve my problem
- Help me find what I need

Activities That Can Help

- Listen to music
- Do something creative
- Go for a walk
- Play a game
- Have a snack or drink



Let's build your Support Toolbox!

Choose the support that you like from the previous page. You can also put in more that are not in the list. Write the things that may help you during difficult moments in the space below.

Use this as a guide for you and for others so they know how to support you during difficult times.

Things that can help me



My Daily-Check In

Taking a few minutes to check in with yourself may help you notice what you're feeling, what might be affecting you, and what helps you feel supported.

You don't need to write a lot or have all the answers. Just take a moment to notice how your day felt for you.

You can use this check-in journal each day to pause, reflect, and get to know yourself a little better.

As you check in, you might wonder:



- What am I feeling right now?
- What happened today that may have affected how I feel?
- What do I need more or less of right now?
- What is one thing I can do to look after myself?

There are no right or wrong answers. This is your space to be honest with yourself, without judging what you feel.

My Check-In Journal

Date: _____

Today I felt...

Circle or write as many as needed

😊 Happy | 😌 Calm | 😴 Tired | 😢 Sad | 😠 Angry
😟 Worried | 😣 Stressed | 😰 Anxious | 😞 Upset
😤 Frustrated | 😨 Scared | 🌊 Overwhelmed | 🤔 Confused
😄 Silly | 🎯 Focused | 💛 Comfortable |
💭 Other: _____

Something that affected how I felt today was...

_____

_____

My favourite thing about today is...

_____

_____

What helped me today was...

_____

_____

One thing I remember from today...

_____

_____

Helping Without Fixing

Teenagers may be going through a lot. There are many changes that are happening that can be overwhelming for them. Watching them experience difficult moments can be distressing for the people who care about them. This is why there is always an urge to fix the difficult moments for them.

Support can sometimes look different.

Supporting teenagers may not 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
- Helping them plan how to manage difficulties
- Making them feel heard, understood, and less alone

What might happen 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 might make it more about ourselves (our way, our solution, our comfort)
- We might create distance when they don't want to share anymore

When teenagers share, they want you to listen. Sometimes, they might not want solutions right away or at all. Your presence may be what they need.



Sometimes, they also want to tell their friends more. Peer relationships can support growing independence. Adults can respect these connections while remaining available and attentive to safety.

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 and avoid 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 hard. I'm here with you."
Stay curious	Even if you feel like you really know the solution, please take time to pause and be more curious. Consider asking them to tell you more or what would help. This might also help them understand their emotions and plan what they want to do next.
Validation	Avoid minimising or dismissing their experiences or difficulties. Instead, acknowledge and validate that what they are going through is overwhelming for them. Knowing that you are there for them might also help.
Sharing your input if they ask	If they ask for your advice, gently share your insights. Remember, we should not assume that our insights are always correct for them. Giving them a choice is important. ("You might consider...")
Supporting safety while respecting independence	Sometimes, teenagers want to speak more to their peers. This is not something to stop immediately. Instead, their safety with the people they speak with is the priority while still being there to support them.

Here are some sample situations and scripts that might help.

What's happening?	My first instinct	What might help without fixing?
The teenager comes home upset and goes straight to their room.	"What happened? Tell me what's wrong. You shouldn't be alone when you're upset."	"Okay. I'll give you some space. I'm here when you want me."
The teenager is frustrated because they are struggling with an assignment.	"Give it to me. I'll show you how to do it."	"Would you like help, or would you rather have some time to work it out?"
The teenager says, "I don't want to talk about it," when I check in.	"You need to talk to me. Keeping it to yourself won't help."	"That's okay. You don't have to talk right now. I'm here when you're ready."
The teenager is overwhelmed and stops responding to my messages.	"Why aren't you replying? I need to know what's going on."	Send a simple message such as, "No need to reply. Just letting you know I'm here."

When a teenager is having a hard time, the words we use may help them feel safe, understood, and supported. Here are some scripts that may be helpful when they are overwhelmed, upset, or finding things difficult.

When I want them to know I'm here

"I'm here if you need me."

"I'm around if you need me."

"You don't have to talk. I just want you to know I'm here."

When I want to give them space

"Take your time. You can come to me when you're ready."

"I'll give you some time."

"Would you like some space for a while?"

When I want to acknowledge their feelings

"That sounds really tough."

"It's okay to feel upset."

"I can see this has been a lot for you."

When I want to offer help without taking over

"What would feel helpful right now?"

"Would you like me to stay or give you some space?"

"Would you like me to listen or help you work through it?"

Notice the Clues, then Check

Sometimes, teenagers need some space when things feel difficult or overwhelming. They may not always say exactly what they need, and their way of showing this can be different from one day to the next.

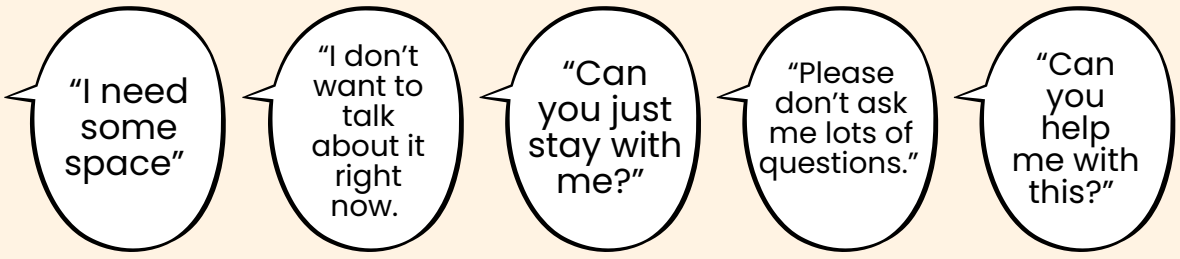
As carers, it can be easy to jump in, ask lots of questions, or try to solve the problem. But what we think a teenager needs may not be what they actually want. Giving teenagers opportunities to communicate their preferences may help us support them while respecting their growing independence.

- **Notice** rather than assume.
- **Ask** rather than decide for someone.
- **Offer** rather than impose.
- **Support** rather than automatically take over.
- **Remain available** while respecting autonomy.
- **Step in** when safety or genuine support needs require it.

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

Noticing

Some clues may be said through words:



Listening to what a teenager actually says, rather than deciding what they need for them, may help us provide support that feels respectful and useful.

Sometimes, clues are not said through words but through actions

- Going to their room or another quiet space
- Avoiding interactions
- Becoming quieter than usual
- Giving shorter or fewer responses or none at all
- Becoming visibly overwhelmed or frustrated
- Speaking more sharply or raising their voice

Changes in behaviour can be important clues, but they do not tell us exactly what a teenager needs. Our first instinct might be to step in, solve the problem, or get them to talk. Instead, we can pause and check in.

Asking and Offering Choices

Every teenager has their own preferences for support. Some may want someone to stay nearby. Others may want to be left alone for a while. Some may want practical help, while others may simply want someone to listen. These preferences can also change depending on the situation.

When offering choices, use clear, simple language. A visual support can also be used if helpful. Where possible, consider offering only a couple of choices at a time so the decision does not feel overwhelming.



Respecting their choices and providing the preferred support



If a teenager chooses for you to stay quietly with them, you do not need to fill the silence or solve the problem. Your presence may be exactly what they need.

If they choose to have some space, respect that choice while continuing to make sure they are safe and know that support is available when they are ready.

If they choose to be with friends, allow them time with their friends while making sure that they are safe.

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
Jay notices that a teenager has come home after a difficult day and goes straight to their room. When Jay checks in, the teenager says, "I don't want to talk about it."

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

The teenager came home after a difficult day and went straight to her room. When Jay checked in, she said, "I don't want to talk about it."

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

Jay's first instinct was to ask what happened and encourage her to talk to him. Jay paused and recognised that he was assuming she needed to talk, when the teenager may have needed something else.

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

The teenager told Jay she did not want to talk and said she needed some time before having a conversation.

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

Jay will respect the teenager's request for space while letting her know he is available when she is ready. Jay can say, "That's okay. Take your time. I'm here if you need me."

Sometimes, staying available is enough.

This activity may help us pause, notice, and listen before we respond. Let's 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 teenager 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 them if they need you or any support.



Respect their choices: Follow the teenager'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. When a teenager is having a hard time, they may not want to talk, answer questions, or explain what is happening. Being calmly present can let them know they are supported without putting pressure on them to interact.

Why is Safe Silence Helpful?

Quietly staying available may:

- Help the teenager feel safe, supported, and not alone
- Give them time and space to settle
- Reduce the pressure to talk, explain, or respond
- Give them more choice and control over when they communicate
- Show them that they do not need to have an answer straight away
- Help carers practise pausing, observing, and following the teenager's lead
- Maintain connection without requiring conversation
- Show the teenager that support is available even when they want some privacy

Safe silence is not about making a teenager sit quietly with you. It is about being available without expecting anything from them.



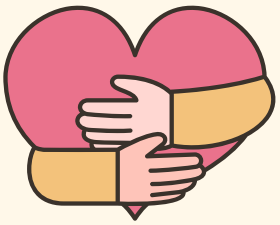
The Safe Silent Presence Activity provides a simple guide for being there without needing to fix the situation or fill the silence.

Be nearby. Be Calm. Be Available.

For as long as needed or comfortable:

- **Be nearby:** Give the teenager comfortable space and remain available.
- **Be calm:** Keep your own voice, body, and pace calm.
- **Less words:** Avoid too many questions, advice, or trying to solve the problem.
- **Notice:** Pay attention to their cues without staring or expecting a response.
- **Stay available:** Let them know you are there if they want support.
- **Let them lead:** They can choose whether to talk, have space, or reconnect when they are ready.

Sometimes, the most helpful thing we can do is to give them space while letting them know they are not alone.



Am I Supporting or Rescuing?

When a teenager is struggling, it can be natural to want to step in and make things easier. We may want to solve the problem, speak for them, or prevent them from feeling upset. Helping is not a bad thing. The important part is making sure our support does not take away their opportunities to make choices, try things for themselves, or work through difficulties with support.

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?

Not necessarily. There are times when a teenager genuinely needs us to step in, especially when there are safety concerns or they need immediate support.

The aim is not to leave a teenager to manage everything on their own. Instead, we want to provide the right amount of support at the right time. Sometimes, all they need is our guidance, encouragement, or presence rather than taking over.

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 what they communicated, including through their behaviour and body language?
- Give them opportunities to experience manageable frustration, uncertainty, or disappointment?
- Step in because support was genuinely needed, or because I felt uncomfortable seeing them struggle?
- Support them to build confidence, skills, or independence?
- Respect their right to say no, change their mind, or ask for space?

