Healing Species Texas

WHERE RESCUED DOGS TEACH COMPASSION

Foundation Lessons

A Character Education & Social-Emotional Learning Program for School Districts

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Healing Species Texas brings trained instructors and a rescued dog directly into the classroom to teach students about kindness, resilience, safety, and healing. Every dog in the program was once abandoned, neglected, or mistreated, and each one's journey from hurt to trust gives students a story they can see, touch, and remember.

The **Foundation Lessons** are a condensed, three-session version of our full eight-week Healing Species curriculum, created for districts that want to bring the program to their students but cannot commit to the full series. They deliver the core of what makes Healing Species effective: a real rescued dog, a real rescue story, and practical tools students can use when they or someone around them is hurting.

Why rescued dogs?

Students who may resist a lecture about empathy or resilience respond to a dog who has lived it. A rescued dog who learned to trust people again is a living example of second chances, and it opens a safe door for students to talk about their own challenges without having to tell their own story first.

AT A GLANCE

Format	In-classroom lessons led by Healing Species Texas instructors with a rescued dog
Sessions	3 Foundation Lessons
Session length	30–40 minutes
Grade levels	Adaptable for elementary through high school
Subject fit	Character education, advisory, counseling, service learning, and SEL (supports all five core SEL competencies)
Core themes	Resilience, trust and healing, personal safety, individuality and respect, empathy, advocacy, service

WHAT STUDENTS WILL GAIN

- Understand resilience and second chances through the true stories of rescued dogs
- Learn how to stay safe around dogs, at school, at home, and in the community
- Identify trusted adults they can go to when they are hurt, afraid, or being bullied
- Learn a simple three-step approach to healing from hurt: **Tell, Grieve, Give Back**
- Recognize and respect individual differences in others, and build confidence in their own strengths
- Build empathy for classmates and others who are recovering, healing, or rebuilding
- Practice empathy and advocacy through a hands-on service project that benefits animals at a local shelter

LESSON SYNOPSES

INTRODUCTORY LESSON

What Rescued Dogs Can Teach Us

"Every rescued dog has a scar, but also a story of strength. So do we."

Students meet the idea at the heart of the program: rescued dogs, like people, often carry scars, but they also show remarkable resilience and the ability to love again. The lesson opens with a discussion of why rescued dogs may behave differently than dogs raised in loving homes, then moves into the true story of **Gus**, a rescued dog whose recovery shows what patience, care, and second chances can do.

In small groups or as a class, students talk through what Gus went through, what helped him recover, and what character traits he and his rescuers showed. The conversation then turns to real life: friends coming through hard times, changing schools, or healing from loss, and why trust and patience matter when someone is healing. Students complete a private reflection on a challenge they have overcome, who helped them, and how they can be a "rescuer" for someone else, then close with a sharing circle.

Key takeaways: resilience, second chances, empathy for others who are healing

FOUNDATION LESSON 1

Dog Safety and Healing

"No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted."

Students meet their Healing Species instructors and the classroom dog, and hear that dog's rescue story. Instructors introduce two vocabulary words that anchor the program, **species** and **rescue**, and teach clear safety rules for approaching any dog: when and how to approach, the "dog ears" signal for quiet, and the one-finger pet. A few students then demonstrate a proper dog greeting.

Through the picture book *Can I Be Your Dog?* by Troy Cummings and the video story of Gus, students explore what it means to be rescued. Instructors then introduce the program's **three steps to heal from hurt, abuse, and bullying**:

1. **Tell.** Who can you tell? What if the first person you tell doesn't help? What will you do next?
2. **Grieve.** Why is it important to cry and let feelings out? What happens when feelings stay bottled up?
3. **Give back, give kindness.** Using the story of the Grinch, students compare what his heart looked like when he stole the toys and how he treated his dog, with what it looked like when he gave them back.

Each student identifies **three people they could tell if they are hurt**. The lesson ends with "Dog Time," a review of the safety rules as instructors walk the dog around the room.

Key takeaways: dog safety, identifying trusted adults, the Tell–Grieve–Give Back healing steps

Extension Activities

Optional ways for teachers to carry the lessons further:

- **Creative writing:** "If I Were a Rescued Dog…"
- **Art:** a symbolic drawing of transformation, before and after rescue
- **Interview** a dog owner about their pet's unique traits
- **Class poster:** "All Kinds of Awesome" dog-and-human personality comparisons

What the School Provides

- A classroom or meeting space
- A whiteboard or projector for short videos
- Student journals or notebooks for reflection
- A teacher or counselor present during each session

Healing Species Texas provides the instructors, the rescued dog, lesson materials, and reflection worksheets.

FOUNDATION LESSON 2

One of a Kind: What Dogs Teach Us About Individuality

"No two dogs wag their tails the same, and that's what makes them wonderful."

Students start with a simple question: do all dogs act the same? Some dogs are shy, some are full of energy, and while breeds may have tendencies, every dog has its own temperament, likes, and dislikes. Students then turn the idea toward themselves and each other.

Through photos and clips of working dogs, therapy dogs, and goofy family pets, students compare behaviors, name the dog that reminds them of themselves, and talk about how to respect a dog, or a person, for being different. Together the class builds a **"Celebrate the Differences"** chart: a calm, steady bulldog shows you don't have to be loud to be strong; a cautious but loyal rescue dog shows that patience leads to trust; a loud, active husky shows that energy is a strength in the right place.

Students then write or draw their own **personality profile**, naming three traits, what makes them feel safe, and what helps them thrive. The lesson ends with a takeaway challenge: this week, get to know one person who seems different from you.

Key takeaways: respect, identity, acceptance, appreciation of differences, self-confidence

FOUNDATION LESSON 3 · SERVICE LEARNING

Making a Difference for Shelter Animals

"It made a difference to that one."

The final Foundation Lesson moves students from learning about empathy to practicing it. The lesson is built around *The Starfish Story*, in which a young man finds an old man tossing stranded starfish back into the sea, one at a time. When the young man points out there are far too many to save, the old man throws in one more and answers that it mattered to that one.

Students talk about what the story means: a problem can be too big for one person to solve, but every act of kindness still matters to the one who receives it. Instructors connect the story to the animals waiting in local shelters, many with stories like the rescued dogs students have met, and to the people in students' own lives who need someone to notice them. Students then put empathy and advocacy into action:

- **Toys** for shelter dogs and cats
- **Blankets** to bring comfort to animals waiting for homes
- **Treats** for shelter animals
- **A writing activity** in which students speak up for shelter animals, giving a voice to those who cannot speak for themselves

The finished items are donated to a local shelter, so students leave the program knowing they have personally made a difference.

Key takeaways: empathy in action, advocacy, service to others, every act of kindness matters

Bring the Foundation Lessons to your students

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