

Risk Assessment Information for Schools

1.0 Story Dogs Risk Management Statement

Story Dogs is a school-approved literacy support program that helps students build reading confidence through weekly reading sessions with an independently accredited Dog Team (dog and volunteer).

The program operates with the Principal's or authorised school person's approval and within the school's existing supervision, safeguarding, medical and emergency-management framework. Parent/carer giver consent is required before a student participates.

Story Dogs manages risk through volunteer screening, child-safety procedures, Dog Team assessment, training, dog welfare monitoring, lead control, restrictions on playground attendance during break times, "Pats not Hugs" student and staff interaction expectations, mobile phone use policy and incident reporting procedures.

Participating schools retain responsibility for student selection, consent, medical/allergy information, student supervision, session location, emergency procedures, other dogs on school premises and local risk assessment requirements.

Sessions are to be conducted in agreed school locations that are visible and in sight of school staff. Volunteers should only have the student's first name, with permission forms retained by the school.

When implemented in accordance with Story Dogs procedures and school requirements, the program presents a low and manageable risk profile. Schools should complete any local or departmental risk assessment required by their sector, jurisdiction or insurer.

The following risk and control summary is designed to help schools complete any necessary school based risk assessments in order to commence the program in your State or Territory.

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2.0 Risk and Control Summary

Risk area	What could happen	Key controls	Indicative residual risk – with implemented controls	Primary responsibility
Child safeguarding	A student is harmed, groomed, subjected to inappropriate contact or placed in an unsafe one-to-one situation.	Current Working With Children/Vulnerable People Check; Story Dogs child-safety Volunteer training; school visitor procedures; sessions only in sight of school staff; no mobile phone usage; first-name-only student information; immediate reporting of concerns.	Low	Story Dogs and School
Student supervision	Student cannot be located, is absent from expected class location, or is inadequately supervised.	Scheduled sessions; School Contact aware of timetable; attendance checked by school; agreed session location; student movement managed under school procedures.	Low	School
Consent and information	Student participates without informed parent/carers consent or without relevant medical/behavioural information being considered.	Parent consent before participation; school records; student suitability screening; parent/carers disclosure of allergy, fear, asthma or behaviour concerns; school retains forms.	Low	School
Student allergy or asthma	Student experiences allergic reaction, asthma or discomfort associated with dog contact.	Pre-participation medical/allergy check; hand hygiene; distance or alternative arrangements; access to medications under school procedures; non-participation where required.	Low	School
Student fear or anxiety	Student becomes distressed, avoids reading, or has negative experience due to fear of dogs.	Voluntary participation; informed consent; school suitability check; gradual introduction if appropriate; alternative literacy support; stop session if student uncomfortable.	Low	School



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Risk area	What could happen	Key controls	Indicative residual risk – with implemented controls	Primary responsibility
Student behaviour affecting safety	Student rough-handles, hugs, crowds, startles or behaves in a way that increases dog stress or risk of injury.	Student selection; behaviour expectations; “Pats not Hugs”; Volunteer advocacy for dog; session stopped if unsafe; parent/school review before continuation.	Low to Medium	School and Volunteer
Dog bite, scratch, jump or unexpected behaviour	Student, staff member, third party or volunteer is frightened or injured.	Dog Team accreditation by an independent expert; dog on lead; dog never unattended; stress monitoring by Volunteer; weekly dog interaction review; no Dog Teams in playground during breaks; weekly dog interaction review; emergency procedure; incident review and additional Dog Team assessment before return.	Low to Medium	Story Dogs and Volunteer
Dog welfare and stress	Dog becomes stressed, fatigued, over-handled, unwell or unsuitable for school attendance.	Compulsory annual vet health checks; vaccination or titre test; worming; positive handling; no harsh equipment; maximum of 2 sessions per week with no back to back sessions; no playground crowding; “Pats not Hugs”; Volunteer monitors stress and may withdraw dog.	Low	Story Dogs and Volunteer
Volunteer compliance	Volunteer attends without required clearance, training, orientation or understanding of school procedures.	Current Working with Children/Vulnerable People/ check; Story Dogs training; school orientation; sign-in/out; school visitor procedures; Coordinator support.	Low	Story Dogs and School
Privacy and boundaries	Volunteer receives unnecessary student information or relationship becomes overly personal.	First-name-only approach; school holds permission forms and student information; sessions remain positive and dog and or literacy-focused; concerns reported through school/Story Dogs channels.	Low	Story Dogs and School



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Emergency event	Evacuation, lockdown, medical emergency or other school emergency occurs during a session.	School emergency procedures; Volunteer follows staff directions; dog kept on lead; emergency contact information; staff know session location; incident reporting.	Low	School and Volunteer
Public or visitor interaction	Unauthorised people interact with students or dog, or school visitor procedures are not followed.	School visitor procedures; Volunteer sign-in/out; agreed session location; no playground loitering; concerns escalated to School Contact.	Low	School and Volunteer
Infection control / zoonotic risk	Minor infection or hygiene issue occurs from dog contact.	Dog health requirements; vaccination/titre and worming; vet checks; hand hygiene; students do not share food with dog; school hygiene procedures.	Low	Story Dogs, Volunteer and School
Incident reporting and review	A near miss or incident is not documented, preventing learning and corrective action.	Volunteer training on incident reporting, Volunteer's immediate reporting to School Contact and Coordinator; school incident procedures; Story Dogs incident record; post-incident review; corrective action before resuming.	Low	Story Dogs, Volunteer and School

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3.0 School Implementation Checklist

Before the program commences

Minimum requirement	Responsible
Principal/delegate approval obtained for Story Dogs to operate at the school.	School
Story Dogs Program Agreement or equivalent school agreement completed.	School / Story Dogs
School Contact nominated and contact pathway agreed.	School
Session day, time, location and student movement process agreed.	School / Volunteer
Reading location is visible, accessible and in sight of school staff.	School
Parent/carer consent obtained for each participating student.	School
Relevant allergy, asthma, medical, fear or behavioural information reviewed.	School
Student suitability considered, including behaviour that may affect dog welfare.	School
Volunteer clearance sighted or confirmed as required by school policy.	Story Dogs / School
Dog Team accreditation, training and vet/health requirements confirmed by Story Dogs.	Story Dogs
Volunteer briefed on school sign-in, visitor, emergency, evacuation and lockdown procedures.	School
Staff briefed on "Pats not Hugs", dog interaction expectations and session supervision.	School / Story Dogs
Incident reporting pathway agreed between School Contact and Story Dogs Coordinator.	School / Story Dogs
Current public liability insurance certificate requested and filed if required.	School / Story Dogs

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On each session day

Session-day control	Responsible
Volunteer signs in and follows visitor procedures.	Volunteer / School
Dog remains on lead and under Volunteer control at all times.	Volunteer
Dog is not left unattended at school.	Volunteer
Volunteer avoids playground attendance during break times unless Story Dogs and school have specifically assessed and approved an exception.	Volunteer / School
Student attendance and movement to/from session is managed under school procedures.	School
Session occurs only in the agreed visible location.	Volunteer / School
Students and staff apply "Pats not Hugs".	All
Any student discomfort, allergy symptoms, behaviour issue or dog stress is acted on immediately.	Volunteer / School
Any concern, incident or near miss is reported to the School Contact and Story Dogs Coordinator.	Volunteer / School

Ongoing controls

Ongoing control	Responsible
Weekly Dog Interaction Review Sheet or equivalent monitoring is completed as required by Story Dogs.	Volunteer / Story Dogs
Student list and consent status are kept current.	School
Medical, allergy or behavioural changes are reviewed before continued participation.	School
Dog welfare concerns are escalated and may result in pause, withdrawal or re-assessment.	Volunteer / Story Dogs
Volunteer clearance currency is monitored.	Story Dogs / School
Incidents and near misses are reviewed for corrective action.	Story Dogs / School
Annual review completed or sooner if circumstances change.	Story Dogs / School

4.0 FAQ's School Risk and Safeguarding

4.1 Is Story Dogs safe for students?

Yes, when implemented according to Story Dogs and school procedures. The program uses a narrow, controlled model: approved students attend scheduled reading sessions with an approved Volunteer and Story Dog in a school-approved location, with school oversight and parent/carer consent.

4.2 Is a Story Dog a therapy dog or a school dog?

No. A Story Dog should not be described as a general therapy dog or school dog. The program is a structured literacy support program. The dog's role is to help create a calm, enjoyable reading environment, not to provide general therapy, behaviour management or all-day school support.

4.3 Who supervises the student?

Students remain in the care of the school. The Volunteer supports the reading session but does not replace the school's supervision responsibilities. Sessions should be scheduled, visible and known to relevant school staff.

4.4 Are sessions one-to-one?

Yes. Story Dogs sessions involve one student, one Volunteer and one dog for a 20min reading session. Because this creates a one-to-one adult-child context, the safeguarding controls are important: sessions must occur in agreed school locations that are visible and in sight of school staff, and volunteers should not be alone and out of sight with a student.

4.5 What student information does the Volunteer receive?

The Story Dogs volunteers only have the student's first name. Permission forms are held by the school and only the Target Student Information sheet, which includes information on a student's current level of reading and or confidence of reading, and if there is a topic that specifically interests a student. This form is completed by the classroom teacher and provided to the volunteer. This supports privacy, reduces unnecessary information sharing and helps keep the relationship positive but not personal.

4.6 How are volunteers screened?

Volunteers must comply with applicable Working with Children, Working with Vulnerable People, requirements for the state or territory in which they volunteer. They must also comply with Story Dogs policies including but not limited to the Code of Conduct.



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4.7 How are dogs assessed?

The Volunteer and Dog are assessed as a Team by an independent experienced dog trainer or behaviourist. The Dog Team must pass a 10 point assessment which covers;

- grooming and appearance of the dog,
- ability of the dog to cope with patting and being handled
- ability of the dog to walk calmly on a loose lead, including past other dogs, toys and food
- to have a strong recall ability, although the dog will never be off lead in school
- to not show any resource guarding tendencies
- to settle quickly onto the reading rug
- to cope with loud noises and distractions without stress and or overt reactions

4.8 What dog handling controls apply at school?

The dog must remain under the Volunteer's control, always being on lead when at school. The dog is never left unattended, and the Dog Team are not in the playground during break times.

These controls reduce uncontrolled interaction, crowding, stress, noise and unexpected student contact.

4.9 Why is "Pats not Hugs" important?

"Pats not Hugs" is both a dog welfare control and a student safety control. Hugging can increase stress for some dogs, and stress is a known precursor risk for dog incidents. The safer expectation is that students and staff pat the dog appropriately and avoid hugging, crowding or rough contact.

4.10 What if a student is afraid of dogs?

Participation should be voluntary and based on parent/carer consent and school judgement. A student who is strongly afraid of dogs should not be required to participate. Schools may use gradual familiarisation only where appropriate and agreed, or provide alternative literacy support.

4.11 What if a student has allergies, asthma or other medical needs?

The school should identify relevant allergies, asthma triggers or medical conditions before participation. The school should retain medical information and medications in accordance with its normal procedures. Controls may include alternative arrangements, hand hygiene, distancing, or non-participation where appropriate.

4.12 What if a student has behaviours that may affect dog welfare or safety?

The school should consider student suitability before obtaining consent and commencing the program. A student whose behaviour may be detrimental to the dog, the Volunteer, themselves or others should not participate unless the school and Story Dogs agree that effective controls are in place.



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4.13 What if the dog becomes stressed or unsettled?

The Volunteer should stop or pause the session, increase distance, remove the dog from the situation if needed, and report concerns to the School Contact and Story Dogs Coordinator. Ongoing dog stress should trigger review of suitability, schedule, location or continued participation.

4.14 What if a dog scratches, bites, jumps or other incident occurs?

The session should stop immediately. The school should provide first aid and follow school incident procedures. The Volunteer should secure the dog, notify the School Contact and Story Dogs Coordinator and follow Story Dogs Incident Reporting procedures. An incident report form is completed. If a practice session for emergency procedures is scheduled for a day the Story Dogs team attends, they should be alerted to this, as they may choose to not attend that day.

Serious incidents require escalation, parent/carers notification, and review before the Dog Team returns to school.

4.15 What emergency procedures apply?

The school's emergency procedures apply on school grounds. Volunteers should be briefed on evacuation, lockdown and emergency communication expectations, and should follow school staff directions during an emergency while keeping the dog under control. Story Dogs has its own emergency procedure, with the Volunteer blowing a whistle if assistance is required.

4.16 What if a safeguarding concern is raised?

Any safeguarding concern must be reported immediately through school procedures and Story Dogs procedures. Concerns may include inappropriate adult behaviour, student disclosure, bullying, rough contact, unsafe location, grooming concerns, inappropriate language or any situation where a student may be at risk of harm.

4.17 Are parents/carers given required to consent?

Yes. Parent/carers consent is a core program control. Consent should be informed and should allow the parent/carers to disclose relevant allergy, fear, medical or behavioural information.

4.18 What documents should schools hold?

The school should hold or be able to access parent consent, student selection information, relevant medical/allergy information, Story Dogs Program Agreement signed by current Principal, attendance arrangements, session location details, emergency procedures and any incident records, any reported Child Protection Form. Story Dogs holds its own Volunteer and Dog Team approval records.



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4.19 What insurance applies?

Story Dogs' holds public liability insurance to \$20 million. Schools or departments should request a current certificate of currency or insurer confirmation if required by their approval process.