

Supplementary material

Table S1. Canine-assisted intervention: examples of individual objectives.

Domain	Description
<i>Communication</i>	To produce clear and understandable speech
	To use sentences with 4 or more words to exchange information (e.g. location of objects)
	To be able to ask a meaningful question
	To speak to the dog
	To express a preference to others
	To increase the number of requests to others
	To ask the dog to do a command
<i>Cognitive functioning</i>	To remember and use the dog's name
	To recognise the rest and feeding needs of the dog
	To sequence the steps of the task with the dog appropriately
	To remember and use the name of the therapist
	To engage in a play activity with the dog and the therapist
	To reduce the need for personal help to organise the workspace
	To start the task at the appropriate time without relying on prompts
<i>Psychomotor skills and use of the body</i>	To make physical contact with the dog
	To make positive physical contact with others
	To demonstrate physical affection to an adult by hugging
	To increase visual contact with the therapist
	To demonstrate positive affect through smiles
<i>Social interaction</i>	To be able to initiate an interaction with another person
	To follow social norms during a social interaction
	To reduce the frequency of disruptive behaviours during a play activity
	To increase displays of appropriate affection towards others
	To share materials and tools with others
	To improve the ability to take appropriate turns with the therapist and tutors

Table S2. Criteria for the selection and allocation of the therapy dogs in the study.

Domain	Description
<i>Age</i>	Age over 1.5 years
<i>Health</i>	Verification of compliance with protocols and standards in regard to vaccination, health status and hygiene Optimal health status, certified by a veterinarian (full veterinary check-ups of the dogs)
<i>Temperament and behaviour</i>	Assessment for temperament and behaviour to verify basic skills as a therapy dog: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Calm temperament ○ Patient ○ Even-tempered ○ Docile ○ Respectful ○ Obedient behaviour: basic obedience skills ○ Drawn to people: social and friendly behaviour ○ Predictable reactions ○ Easy management of insecurities ○ Ability to cope with stress ○ Comfortable in a range of settings: easy adaptation to various environments Constant supervision (observation) during the study Reassessments of the dog every six months
<i>Training</i>	Training by a professional from a specialised external center (Montegatto) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Minimum duration of 6 months ○ Obedience commands ○ Training to assist in therapy: specific training as a therapy dog ○ Specialised training in working with children with disabilities One year of experience working with children

Table S3. Profiles of the therapy dogs included in the study.

Dog	Sex	Age (years) ^a	Size	Breed
<i>Lusco</i>	M	2	Large size	Galician Shepherd Dog
<i>Nana</i>	F	2	Medium size	Golden Retriever
<i>Moom</i>	F	2	Large size	Labrador Retriever
<i>Marrón</i>	M	2	Large size	Labrador Retriever
<i>Kika</i>	F	3	Large size	Labrador Retriever
<i>Gym</i>	F	3	Large size	Labrador Retriever
<i>Chuspi</i>	M	3	Small size	Chihuahua
<i>Yogui</i>	M	4	Large size	Labrador Retriever
<i>Fusco</i>	M	8	Large size	Galician Shepherd Dog

^aFirst session in the research.

Table S4. Strategies to promote the welfare of the therapy dogs during the study.

Domain	Description
<i>Sessions</i>	<p>1:1 ratio of participants to animals</p> <p>Each dog worked with the same therapist and handler</p> <p>Each dog works with a maximum of four participants per day</p>
<i>Safety of the animal</i>	<p>Safe and comfortable dog transportation</p> <p>Constant supervision during the sessions: the professional handler monitors and interprets the behaviour and emotions of the dogs</p> <p>End of the intervention sessions in situations involving risks to the dog's safety. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aggressive behaviours of the child towards the dog ○ Accidental maltreatment of the dogs by the children
<i>Rest</i>	<p>During the sessions: a break every 45 minutes</p> <p>This break is a minimum of ten minutes</p> <p>Quiet time and space between sessions</p>
<i>Hygiene</i>	<p>The handler is responsible for the correct hygiene and grooming of the dog</p> <p>Animal bath within 24 h of the session</p> <p>Brushing the dog's coat before the session</p> <p>Dog nail trimming</p> <p>Cleaning of the therapy equipment at least weekly or as needed</p>
<i>Health</i>	<p>Full veterinary check-ups were conducted periodically (every six months or as needed)</p> <p>Regular treatments for fleas, ticks and parasites</p> <p>Complete and updated vaccination</p>