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Promoting prosocial behavior and emotional awareness in preschoolers

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Abstract: Human-animal interaction (HAI) supports a theory that animals may enhance social support both directly, as a source of comfort, and indirectly, as a facilitator of human interaction. Existing research found that dogs are suitable in helping children develop healthy self-esteem and empathy for others and the classroom interaction between assistance dogs and children is also effective in developing children's sense of responsibility and empathy. The current study implemented dog-assisted interaction (DAI) and video interaction (VI) as two different experimental conditions to test their efficacies in promoting preschoolers' prosocial behaviors and emotional awareness. A total of 146 Chinese children (aged from 3 to 5.5 years old) participated in the study. The results indicated that both DAI and VI are more effective in promoting collaborative behaviors than regular teaching method on their collaborative ability and emotional awareness while only DAI significantly enhanced children's emotional awareness.