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Therapy Dog

A **therapy dog** is a dog that is trained to provide affection, comfort and support to people, often in settings such as:

- Hospitals
- Retirement homes
- Nursing homes
- Schools & Universities
- Libraries
- Hospices
- Disaster areas
- Airports

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Types of Visits

- Social visits
 - Great for dog lovers
 - The dog as an excuse to make a personal visit
- Educational visits
 - Teach about dog breeds or how to interact with a dog
- Reading programs (Read With Me™, Reading with Rover)
- Stress breaks
- Animal Assisted Crisis Response
- Physical/occupational therapy sessions



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Why Therapy Dogs?



Spending time with a therapy dog allows someone dealing with a health issue to have judgment-free interactions and experience unconditional support. Petting or playing with a dog releases oxytocin, sometimes called the “love hormone,” in both your brain and the dog’s brain. The release of oxytocin is associated with:

- Lower levels of cortisol, or the “stress hormone”
- A sense of social connection
- Lower blood pressure
- Increased feelings of relaxation
- These feelings can help patients feel more grounded and reduce anxiety and depression.
- While this is therapy, I am not a therapist

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Animal-Assisted Interventions

- When you and your animal visit as a therapy animal team, you are participating in the larger field of **animal-assisted interventions (AAI)**. Animal-assisted interventions are goal oriented and structured interventions that intentionally incorporate animals in health, education, and human service for the purpose of therapeutic gains and improved health and wellness. *
- **Animal-assisted therapy (AAT)**, **animal-assisted education (AAE)**, and **animal-assisted activities (AAA)** are all forms of animal-assisted interventions. In all these interventions, the animal may be part of a volunteer therapy animal team working under the direction of a professional or an animal that belongs to the professional.

* See "Empirical Support for Therapy Animal Interventions", Dr. Taylor Chastain Griffin, Pet Partners

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Animal Therapy Works

While visiting in the transitional care unit of a large hospital, a therapy animal handler entered a three-bed room with her therapy dog Shana, a golden retriever. She noticed that one of the three patients occupying the room had the privacy curtain completely drawn around the bed. The handler had been told that this patient didn't want a visit, so she finished chatting with the other two women in the room and prepared to leave.

From behind the curtain, a dry voice feebly called, "Could you come here, please?"

The handler moved closer to the curtained area and said, "Can I help you?"

"Would you mind visiting me too?" the woman asked, hesitating between each word.

The handler gingerly pulled the curtain back, not quite sure what to expect. She gasped internally and drew back a little when she saw the woman; her face was disfigured and covered with red sores. Shana, however, without hesitation, trotted right up to the woman, who then sat up in bed and reached out to the dog. They needed no introduction.

The patient stroked Shana for several minutes, gazing into her eyes. No words were exchanged. Finally, she turned to the handler and, with tears cascading down her face, said, "Thank you for stopping by. This dog has made my day."

Shana and her handler were the only visitors that this woman allowed during her hospital stay, because she was worried that people would be repelled by her appearance. Shana didn't care what the patient looked like, though: she just wanted to share her unconditional love.

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A Therapy Dog Role

Therapy dogs go where they are invited!

	Therapy Animal	Assistance Animal	Emotional Support Animal
Primary role is to benefit many people.	✓	✗	✗
Primary role is to support one individual.	✗	✓	✓
Okay to approach and pet in public places.	✓	✗	✗
Has been evaluated to be tolerant of a wide variety of environments.	✓	✓	✗
Able to live in housing with "No Pets" policies.	✗	✓	✓
Special rights of access in public such as stores, restaurants, and airplanes.	✗	✓	✗



*Assistance animals include service, hearing, and guide dogs.

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The Time Commitment



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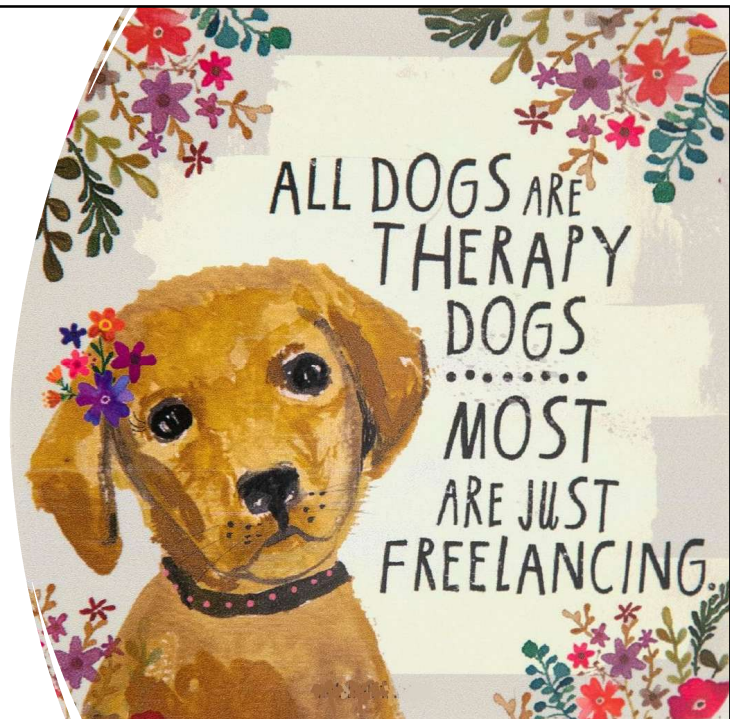
Is My Dog a Good Therapy Candidate?

- An indiscriminating love for all people he meets
- A willingness to voluntarily seek out people to interact with
- A calm demeanor
- A tolerance for physical discomfort. How will they react if someone pulls their tail or pinches their ear?
- Not easily spooked or unsettled (Therapy dogs may hear screaming, get stared at, walk on multiple types of surfaces, ride in elevators, and see and hear different types of equipment.)
- Eats an appropriate diet, has required vaccinations
- At least 1 year old, lived with you for 6 months

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Successful Handlers

- Are friendly, professional and polite
- Can predict and redirect their animal's behavior
- Ensure their animal's well-being at all times
- Follows the policies & procedures of their certifying organization and the facilities they visit



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Become a Therapy Team

- House Trained, wears an appropriate collar or harness
- Basic Obedience
 - Sit, Stay, Down, Come, Walk at your side with a loose leash, leave it
- Train for therapy situations (alone or in a class)
 - Walk in crowds
 - Experience loud and sudden noise
 - Meet people with walkers, wheelchairs, unusual gaits
 - Tolerate hugging, unexpected touch, clumsy petting
 - Walk near other dogs without pulling or barking
- Choose an accrediting organization
 - Pet Partners, Alliance of Therapy Dogs, Love on a Leash, Bright & Beautiful
 - <https://www.akc.org/sports/title-recognition-program/therapy-dog-program/therapy-dog-organizations/>
 - Paws from the Heart is a Rhode Island organization
 - Windwalkers is too



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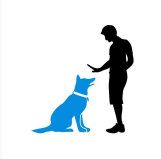
Your Choice is Important

- **Recognized Organization**
 - **Pick based on where you want to visit**
 - We picked Pet Partners because two schools prefer them
 - Your organization can help you find places to visit (like a gymnastics meet)
 - **Providence Airport**
 - Paws from the Heart Dog Therapy and PVD Pups
 - Dynamic Dog Training – Susan Parker
 - **Brown Health has additional requirements**
- **Liability Insurance**
 - Pet Partners has the highest standards in the field for our registered therapy animal teams, and provides liability insurance coverage for our teams while they are visiting, reducing risk. For volunteers only!



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Training the Team



Train the handler

Pet Partners handler training emphasizes advocating for your dog

Additional training for Crisis Response

You may want to find a class for visiting the sick or elderly (JCS, ALZ)



Train the dog

Pet Partners test, does not train your dog

Basic obedience is available at many locations

Local classes targeted for therapy dogs.

- Courteous Canine in Cranston
- Masterpeace Dog Training in Franklin, Mass
- Canine Good Citizen classes

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Any questions?



Thank You



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