

WHAT MAKES A GOOD THERAPY TEAM?

If you are considering becoming a registered Therapy Team with your animal, here is some information for your consideration. Before you can begin the process, you and your animal must have good foundational obedience skills including a reliable “sit”, “down”, “stay”, “come when called” and “leave it”. Your animal should be able to walk at your side with a loose leash. Most importantly, you and your animal must have a great relationship!

Precise obedience skills are not required, however the handler must have control of their animal at all times while visiting. You need to be observant; work together as a team; anticipate your animal’s responses, behavior and positions; and be able to redirect your animal as needed.

Typical ‘Attributes of a Great Therapy Animal’:

- Is comfortable being crowded by a group of people
- Is people-oriented/sociable, friendly and confident
- Will initiate contact, stay engaged, make eye contact, and allow their behaviors to be redirected
- Is able to cope with stressful situations
- Knows how to respect personal boundaries; doesn’t jump up on people
- Is non-aggressive towards animals and people
- Is comfortable being touched, at times awkwardly
- Is controllable, predictable and reliable
- Displays well-mannered interactions with other animals
- Is reliable despite distractions
- Is able to be cued from different positions
- Is able to disregard food or toys on cue, i.e., with a “leave it” command
- Is comfortable around health care equipment
- Is able to handle loud and unexpected noises

Typical ‘Attributes of a Great Handler’:

- Is friendly – makes eye contact, smiles, etc.
- Is a proactive advocate for their animal
- Is a considerate and caring leader
- Develops a relationship with their animal that reflects a loving partnership
- Prepares themselves and their animal for each visit
- Assesses a visit before, during and after
- Is attentive in all situations
- Knows how to enhance their animal’s abilities to be its best with the people it is visiting
- Is aware of signs of animal stress, behaviors, and positions, and can reassure their animal with cues, or commands (as needed) to help the animal be successful.