

Therapy Dogs at a Glance

What is a therapy dog?

- Therapy dogs help people through animal assisted activities (AAA) or animal assisted therapy (AAT)⁽¹⁾
- AAA are informal programs such as visiting children at a library.
- AAT involves a health or human services professional⁽¹⁾. Examples include reducing pain in children⁽²⁾ and relieving combat stress in soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan⁽³⁾.
- Therapy dogs are not service animals as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act

Dog/Handler Teams:

A therapy dog and its handler are often referred to as teams.

Registries

Registries provide training and evaluation services, support, and liability insurance for dog/handler teams that they register.

Examples include:

- Pet Partners[®]
- Therapy Dogs International[®]
- Therapy Dogs, Inc.[®]

Requirements to become a therapy dog/handler team

- Generally, registries require dogs and handlers to pass exams conducted by trained evaluators
- Some registries require dogs to complete obedience training while others don't require formal training
- Some registries require handlers to complete in-person or online courses
- Some registries require a number of supervised volunteer activities before registering a team
- Dogs must have documented good health, such as vaccination records and veterinary exams

Exams

- Conducted by trained evaluators affiliated with a particular registry
- Test basic skills like "sit" and "stay"
- Confirm tolerance for crowding, clumsy petting and loud yelling⁽⁴⁾
- Simulate AAA and AAT settings, like visiting a patient or interacting with children⁽⁵⁾

Groups or Chapters

Therapy dog/handler teams sometimes form groups affiliated with a registry. These groups bring together multiple dog/handler teams in the same location and provide additional support. Local examples include:

- Delta Hearts of Gold
- Heart of Texas Therapy Dogs

¹Pet Partners Website <http://www.petpartners.org/PPTherapyAnimalProgram>

² Pettingell, S. Animal-assisted Therapy As A Pain Relief Intervention For Children. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 15, 105-109. Retrieved June 11, 2014, from the ScienceDirect database.

³Beck, et al, 2012

⁴Pet Partners Program Team Evaluation Part 2 – Aptitude Exercises <http://www.petpartners.org/document.doc?id=1326>

⁵Therapy Dogs International Testing Requirements - <http://www.tdi-dog.org/images/TestingBrochure.pdf>