

Helping and Healing Paws

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Guidelines for Testing the Potential Therapy Dog

When does the Evaluation process begin?

- The team is observed from the time that they enter the building
- If the Evaluator observes inappropriate behavior on behalf of the handler and/or dog, the team will be dismissed immediately. Inappropriate behavior can be: the dog lunging at people or other dogs, dogs starting a fight with another dog, the handler "scruffing" the dog, harsh corrections, inappropriate language on the part of the handler. These are just examples of behaviors that may constitute dismissal.
- If the Evaluator observes conflicts of ANY sort
- All dogs must be on a 6-foot leash and wearing a non-restrictive, non-corrective flat buckle collar or snap-in collar.

The following tests are parts of the whole test. The order in which they are performed by the Evaluator, is up to that Evaluator, just so long as ALL parts of the test are administered.

TEST #1:

A brief temperament test will be performed prior to any dogs taking the actual Therapy Dog test. The temperament test will be explained at the time of the test.

TEST #2: The Entry Table/Registration

This test simulates a check-in at a hospital reception desk. All teams will be lined up, preferably with the dogs on the left side of the handler. The Evaluator will go down the line of teams, greet them and inspect the dogs for proper grooming. Collars will be checked at this time as well.

Failures: Pulling, lunging, jumping up (unruliness), shyness, aggressiveness or resisting any part of the examination is an automatic failure.

Objective: The dog must be friendly and outgoing upon meeting a person, willing to visit the Evaluator, without being overt and invasive, must show good manners.

TEST #3: Out of Sight

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This test will be where the Evaluator asks all of the handlers to leave the room and be out of sight of their dog. The handlers will remain out of sight for at least one minute.

This test is to see how a dog reacts to being separated from their handler, should their handler at some point in time need to step away from their dog during a visit. The dog is to remain calm and quiet during the duration of this test. The handler when leaving, may give their dog a sit/down command, either verbally or by hand signal.

During this test, helpers holding the dogs may talk to the dog or pet the dog. Helpers may also walk around with their temporary dog. Dogs may also sit or lie down during the one minute.

Failures: If the dog whines, barks or pulls away from the helper, it is an automatic failure.

Objective: To have a well-behaved and stable dog, even if the handler needs to step away for a moment.

TEST #4: Getting around a group of people

This test is to see how well a dog behaves in a group of people and dogs. Dogs should stay with their handlers and not be wandering off to visit other dogs and/or people, dogs should not be lagging behind their handler or forging ahead of their handler.

Failures: Excessive pulling on the leash, jumping up, shyness and/or avoidance of the group, aggressiveness.

Objective: A therapy dog must be able to handle various and unexpected situations or encounters. They must be able to interact with various people as well as being touched in all directions, by multiple people at the same time.

TEST #5: Group Sit/Stay

The point of this test is to see if your dog has a reliable sit/stay, even with other teams around them. The handler will be asked to put their dog in a sit/stay, go the end of their leash. Once the Evaluator has observed that the dog has a reliable sit/stay, the handler will be prompted to return to their dog, and to praise their dog. It is important that dogs be verbally rewarded for complying with commands given to them in stressful situations.

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Failures: If the dog does not sit. If the dog does not stay when the handler leaves or if the dog does not stay until the handler returns to the dog.

If the dog fails one of the obedience exercises, the Evaluator MAY continue testing that team and have them come back to whatever exercise that they have failed and re-attempt the failed exercise. However, if the team fails a SECOND obedience exercise, the team will be excused from the test and will need to re-test at a later time, after they have had more time to work on their basic obedience skills.

TEST #6: Group down/stay

This exercise is like Test #5, the group sit/stay, only that the dogs will now be doing a down/stay. All parameters of the sit/stay will apply to the down/stay.

Objective of Tests 5 and 6: All dogs should be willing to work and follow the commands of their handler, even in distracting situations, where there are other dogs and/or people, and at a distance from their handler.

TEST #7: Recall on a 20-foot leash

This test is to see how well of a working relationship that the handler and dog have. Does the dog come willingly and happily if recalled on a 20-foot leash? It will also show the Evaluator how well the working relationship is between the dog and handler, and if the dog is still under the control of the handler.

In this test, the handler will hold on to their 6-foot leash until directed by the Evaluator to switch out their 6-foot leash for the 20-foot leash. The handler will hang on to their leash; they may wrap it around their neck or fold it and place it in a pocket, etc.

The handler will NOT remove the 6-foot leash until the 20-foot leash has been connected to the dog's collar. Once the dog has been connected to the 20-foot leash, the Evaluator will give the handler the command to "leave their dog". At this point in time, the dog may be in a stand/wait, down/wait or sit/wait command. Once the handler has been told to leave their dog, they will go down to the opposite end of the 20-foot leash, turn and face their dog. The Evaluator will instruct the handler to "Call their dog". Handler will release their dog and call the dog to them. The type of command that the handler uses, is entirely up to them. They may use voice, hand signals or both, if they desire.

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Failures: The dog does not stay in place when told to stay/wait. The dog does not come willingly to the handler once they have been released. One or both of these failures will be grounds for dismissal from the balance of the test.

Objectives: The recall is one of the most important tools that a handler has and the dog must master. This could potentially save a dog from a life-threatening situation; therefore, it is one of the most important of the obedience exercises. A dog must be reliable on a recall command; if they are not, then the dog is not obedient and cannot be trusted out in public and cannot pass the therapy dog test.

Test #8: Visiting with a patient

During this test, the dog should show willingness to visit with a person, regardless of whether they are sitting in a wheelchair, standing in a walker or on crutches. The dog must show that they are readily accessible to be pet. Smaller dogs may be placed on a person's lap, however, if this method is used, then the handler should have a towel or small blanket available to place on the person's lap prior to placing the dog on the lap. Handler must be cognitive and aware of leaving dog hair on people that they visit. Medium and large dogs may stand next to or in front of a person for petting. If a handler uses a stool, they should make sure that there is a not-skid surface so that the dog does not slip off of the stool and get injured.

Failures: Shyness, aggressiveness, jumping up and not wanting to visit are reasons for dismissal.

Objective: This test will show what dogs are willing to provide comfort, companionship and stress relief to people intuitively; seeking out people who are in need of a therapy dog.

Test #9: Testing reactions to unusual situations

This series of tests will see how well a dog and handler react to strange and unusual situations. The Evaluator will set out various toys, treats and distractions on the floor where the team will have to navigate. The Evaluator will follow the team as they navigate the "mine field". The dog may not pick up any of the toys or treats at any time. The team will navigate through the distractions to a person in a wheelchair/walker/crutches for a visit. While the team navigates the distractions, the Evaluator or helpers will run up behind the team, making loud noises and stomping their feet. It is OK for the dog to mildly react to the encounter from behind them, however, the **handler must be aware of where or not their dog has been upset by the loud**

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noises or not. If the dog is unsettled, the handler MUST take a moment to calm their dog down before asking them to visit with a stranger. A handler must be an advocate for their dog and make sure that they are in the right frame of mind prior to visiting with a stranger.

Also, during this exercise, the person that is being visited will offer the dog a treat. The dog may NOT take the treat that is being offered. Once the “visit” has been concluded, the team will be asked to perform some basic obedience commands: right turn, about turn and left turn. Once those commands have been concluded, they will once again negotiate through all of the distractions previously encountered.

Failures: If the dog picks up any toy or treat, it will be an immediate dismissal from the test. If the dog accepts a treat from the volunteer in the wheelchair, it will be an immediate dismissal from the test.

Objective: These tests will give the Evaluator a good idea as to how well the team works together, in how well the dog listens to the handler and how the handler reacts to situations that put their dog in an uncomfortable situation. These exercises also show the Evaluator if the team is ready to go on visitations.

TESTS #10-11: Leave-it: with patient and on floor

The parameters for these tests were disclosed in #9. During the visit with the volunteer, the handler must instruct their dog to not take the treat or to lick it. The handler may hold the dog's collar, if needed, to keep the dog from taking the treat.

Handler should explain to the volunteer, that their dog has allergies or is on a special diet, but also thank that person for thinking of their dog. Handlers must at all times, put themselves in the other person's shoes and be courteous at all times. Rudeness will NOT be tolerated at any time.

TEST #12: Meeting of another dog

This test shows how well a dog behaves when around another dog(s). During this test, a volunteer along with their neutral dog, will approach the testing team. Both dogs should be on the outside of the handlers, with the handlers positioned in the middle of both dogs. During this exercise, there should be NO dog-on-dog interaction. Both handlers may ask their dogs to down and/or sit while they briefly chat. The two teams will then depart.

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During this exercise, the testing dog should not show any type of a negative reaction to the neutral dog. The handler may exercise caution and good judgment, by keeping their dog on a shortened leash.

Failures: If the dog pulls, growls, lunges, barks or shows any other signs of aggression, including direct eye contact with the neutral dog, these will be grounds for dismissal from the test.

Objective: It is imperative to have a well-behaved therapy dog not only in our therapy dog program, but always. Our therapy dogs need to be able to tolerate strange and different dogs, as well as get along well with other, strange dogs.

TEST #13: Entering through a door

The purpose of this test is to see how well behaved a dog is when encountering and navigating door. The dog should politely wait at the entrance of the doorway, waiting for their command to go ahead through the doorway. If there are people coming towards the team, the team should patiently and quietly wait for the other people to negotiate the doorway, and then proceed through said doorway.

Failure: If the dog lunges through the doorway without the proper instruction from their handler, will result in dismissal from the test. If the dog cannot wait quietly, without fidgeting until they are released, it will be grounds for dismissal from the test.

Objective: To have well-behaved dogs when encountering and navigating a busy doorway, elevator or other opening.

TEST #14: Reaction to Children

This is the last test given during the therapy dog test. This exercise shows how well a dog behaves around fast-moving, noisy kids. Handlers will be lined up on one side of the testing room, and the children will run, skip, jump, throw a ball, etc. across the length of the facility. Dogs may show interest in the playing kids, but may NOT show aggression towards the kids. ANY type of aggression will be grounds for dismissal from the test, regardless of whether or not they have passed the other components of the test. Therapy dogs must be polite around all people, regardless of gender or age.

Failure: Lunging, barking, excessive movement or ANY type of aggression.

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Objective: To have a well-behaved dog in an extremely exciting environment.

CONCLUSIONS: This series of tests are to ensure that the team is ready for any type of situation that they are presented with, out in the public. Our therapy dogs are held to a higher standard of behavior than what ordinary pets are held at. They must be able to adapt to any given situation, as must their handler. All handlers, must at all times, be courteous and professional. By being professional, that means that they not only dress appropriately, but conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. As a team, you are a representative of Helping and Healing Paws, or if you will, an ambassador for our therapy dog organization. If you find yourself in a situation where you cannot act appropriately, then you must remove both yourself and your dog from the situation, immediately. If a team is reported to Helping and Healing Paws for inappropriate behavior, said team will be subject to a view from the Board of Directors at the least and expulsion from Helping and Healing Paws at the worst.