



Pet Partners[®]

Pet Partners: Professionalizing Therapy Animal Visitation

Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program meets or exceeds guidelines pertaining to safety, professionalism and animal welfare. Pet Partners adheres to the highest standards in the field and is concerned that without such standards the future of therapy animal work could be jeopardized, limiting access to those who could benefit most. Thus, Pet Partners is the choice of risk managers and those who are educated about animal-assisted interventions.

Handler Training

- All Pet Partners handlers complete training prior to registration and have access to continuing education opportunities.
- Pet Partners offers the only handler training on infection prevention publicly endorsed by the Society of Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA).
- Pet Partners offers a canine body language course consistent with SHEA guidelines.
- Pet Partners' education underscores the importance of healthy handlers and animals.

Handler and Animal Assessment

- All Pet Partners handlers must pass a written assessment at the time of registration demonstrating knowledge of best practices for safe and effective visits.
- Pet Partners teams are required to pass an in-person, role play based evaluation every two years, more frequently than recommended guidelines, to continue visiting.
- Pet Partners is piloting a secondary evaluation protocol specifically designed to assess appropriateness for animals interacting with children.

Animal Welfare

- The core tenet of Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program is “you are your animal’s best advocate,” also known as YAYABA™. This requires handlers to modify or end interactions animals no longer enjoy, consistent with animal welfare guidelines.
- Pet Partners limits all visits to no longer than two hours, consistent with recommendations to limit overwork and fatigue.
- To register and renew, Pet Partners teams submit animal health screening forms signed by a veterinarian to ensure the overall health of the participating animal.
- Pet Partners ascribes to a relationship based handler-animal support model during visits, a skill on which handlers are assessed during the evaluation process, known to Pet Partners handlers as PETS™.

Safety Standards

- To ensure that policies reflect current scientific information, Pet Partners relies on veterinary advisors, including those with specialization in epidemiology.
- Based on their guidance, requirements for rabies vaccination and grooming are purposefully stringent.
- Policies prohibit raw protein diets, animals with compromised health, and protection dogs.
- Pet Partners has an easily accessible system for incident reporting and a thorough resolution process to determine if a team can resume visiting. When combined with training, Pet Partners has a very low incidence of serious accidents.

Key Sources

As the leader in the field, Pet Partners places a high degree of importance on aligning with evidence-based guidelines published by other organizations.

- In 2015, the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA) published *Animals in Healthcare Facilities: Recommendations to Minimize Potential Risks*. SHEA is a global professional society whose mission is to prevent and control healthcare-associated infections. In addition to a sweeping set of recommendations to promote safety, including required re-evaluations at least every 3 years, limited visit lengths, one animal per handler, minimum animal age, mandatory leash use, and vaccination requirements, SHEA specifically stated that healthcare facilities should be ensuring a level of formal training that is accompanied by a certificate. No such training existed until it was created by Pet Partners and endorsed by SHEA in 2016.
- The IAHAIO White Paper Definitions for *Animal Assisted Intervention and Guidelines for Wellness of Animals Involved* was published in 2014. It outlines best practices in delivering AAI to ensure the health and well-being of people and animals involved in an AAI setting. Guidelines addressed here include regular evaluations, handler training, prohibition of costumes, and preventing animal overwork, among other welfare considerations.
- The American Journal of Infection Control published *Animal-Assisted Interventions: A national survey of health and safety policies in hospitals, eldercare facilities, and therapy animal organizations* in 2017. This study investigated the AAI program policies in hospitals and eldercare facilities across the United States, as well as policies and procedures of regional and local therapy animal organizations. Their study concluded that “a lack of health care requirements among therapy animal organizations illustrates an important gap in knowledge and the potential for harm. Health care facilities must recognize this wide spectrum of policies amongst animal therapy organizations and become versed in questions for handlers before admittance to the facility.”
- The AVMA maintains *Animal-Assisted Interventions: Guidelines*, a policy standard to which members voluntarily adhere regarding their practice of veterinary medicine. It addresses the importance of routine veterinary care for therapy animals along with requirements for rabies vaccination and consideration for the impact of prescribed medications on zoonotic transmission.



Pet Partners
www.petpartners.org





Therapy Animals and Children

Have you considered bringing therapy animal visitation to your school, library or pediatric medical setting? Pet Partners is the premiere therapy animal program providing qualified volunteers in settings just like yours.

What are the benefits?

- Interactions with therapy animals improves social skills among peers.
- Children experience better focus and confidence while learning with therapy animals present.
- Therapy animals have been found to have a positive effect on pain level, particularly with children.
- Children are more motivated to participate in treatment and maintain their motivation over time with therapy animals.

Examples of Interactions

- Simple social visits by a therapy animal team in a pediatric hospital unit bring a sense of normalcy to young patients, as well as their family and friends.
- Therapy animals are great listeners, and never correct pronunciation, making them a wonderful option for reading programs.
- Therapy animals with can be special guests for lessons about empathy and compassion.

How to Select Teams

In addition to meeting the basic standards for all therapy animal teams, look for other key characteristics for your particular setting.

- Animals of any size can be effective with children, as long as they are not easily distracted and respond promptly to their handler's cues.
- It's about more than just the animal. Handlers should be comfortable appropriately directing interactions between children and their animal in order to set everyone up for success.
- Whether a medical setting or local library, allergies and germs are important considerations. Thorough grooming and good hand hygiene help to mitigate potential problems.

Learn More

- Are you a facility just establishing a therapy animal visitation program? We recommend the How-To Guide for Facilities, published by Tufts Institute for Human-Animal Interaction <http://hai.tufts.edu/paws/for-facilities-seeking-therapy-animals/>
- For details about our programs including Read With Me™, Walk With Me™ and youth endorsement as well as our policies that help ensure safe and effective visits, visit www.petpartners.org/facilities

Why Choose a Pet Partners Team?

Handler Training

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Therapy Animals in Therapeutic Settings

Have you considered incorporating therapy animals in your physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy or other rehabilitation program? Pet Partners is the premiere therapy animal program providing qualified volunteers in settings just like yours.

What are the benefits?

- Therapy animals promote the use of language and increased social interaction in sessions.
- Specifically chosen exercises can target range-of-motion, fine motor skills, strength building, endurance and practice following multistep directions.
- Evidence suggests the presence of a therapy animal increases engagement in activities and longer participation in daily therapy sessions.

Examples of Interactions

- Opening a water bottle and pouring a small amount of water for a thirsty animal is an excellent way to practice fine motor skills in a way that is not usually perceived as a “therapy.”
- Structured exercises such as brushing a certain number of strokes or co-walking, where the handler and patient each hold a leash, can be strategies for strength building.
- Talking or reading to a therapy animal with a speech language therapist can be practice in articulation and pronunciation.
- Retrieving a bag of treats, opening it, offering a treat and then reclosing the bag might be used in occupational therapy to practice performing dependent sequential tasks.

How to Select Teams

In addition to meeting the basic standards for all therapy animal teams, look for other key characteristics for your particular setting.

- Education is important. Handlers should have basis in understanding of HIPPA and infection prevention protocols, which you can tailor to your specific needs.
- With clients receiving some sort of therapy, animals of any size who are confident during non-traditional interactions, comfortable around equipment and easily directed by their handler without distraction by sights, smells and sounds can be effective.
- A partnership between handler and practitioner is important. Handlers who are able to think creatively about what their animal can do with clients can be a benefit to the professional creating the treatment plan.

Learn More

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- For details about Pet Partners’ program and policies which meet the highest standards for safety, visit www.petpartners.org/facilities

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