



WHAT is a Therapy Dog?

- A **therapy dog** is a privately owned “pet” dog that together with their owner or handler, visits people of various ages in order to inspire happiness and better health.
- A **therapy dog** can be any age, any sex or breed, including mixed breeds and may or may NOT be certified or carry insurance.
- A **therapy dog** is NOT a service dog and therefore does not have legal access to public places, such as stores, restaurants or public transportation.

❖ *Unlike Therapy Dogs, SERVICE dogs are not classified as “pets” and are specifically trained to perform a skill or task that is necessary for that individual person to function. An individual may be blind, deaf, wheelchair bound, have seizures, epilepsy or psychological conditions. These are the dogs that have legal rights of public access and their owners cannot function throughout the day without the specific skills and tasks that that dog has been taught to provide.*

What is a CERTIFIED Therapy Dog?

- **Certified therapy dogs** are privately owned pet dogs of any size, sex or breed (including mixed breeds) that are at least ONE year old.
- **Certified therapy dogs** have gentle temperaments and have been through training programs that prepare them to pass specific therapy dog certification tests
- **Certified therapy dogs** are certified and carry insurance through updated yearly memberships in local or national therapy dog programs.
- **Testers** are located in all areas of the country and are trained specifically to conduct testing with established criteria from an individual organization.
- You may choose to qualify, participate and become a member of any therapy dog organization, some of which are local, and others are national. Each organization has its’ own criteria and testers, membership and insurance costs.
- There are facilities that do not require that their therapy dogs be certified or insured, but it certainly is wise to qualify your dog and carry insurance.
- Therapy dog organizations may also require a minimum number of visits per year in order to maintain your membership.
- There are yearly membership fees that include insurance, that are under \$50. per year.

QUALITIES in a any therapy dog

- The dog must be well socialized to people of all sizes, shapes, ages and ethnic backgrounds.
- The dog must like people.
- The dog must have had some obedience training and be able to sit, lay down and stay for at least two minutes.
- The dog must be able to walk on a leash nicely with other people around.
- The dog must be under control and safe around other animals that might be encountered during a visit, such as other dogs, a residential cat or a patient's bird.
- The dog cannot jump on or paw people.
- The dog should never touch its mouth to people; either as a bite or as mouthing (grabbing a hand, for example.) Licks or kisses can be given only on command.
- The dog should not react fearfully to sounds it might encounter during a visit, such as metal bowls falling to the floor, a wheelchair's squeaks and rattles or the hissing of an air hose or an intercom.
- The dog should not react fearfully to visual stimuli that it might encounter during a visit, such as a sheet snapping over a bed or a person walking hunched over a walker.
- The dog's owner must also enjoy people and be willing to do what is necessary to present the dog to people so that the dog can work its magic
- Some people say that a therapy dog is “born” , not ‘made”, meaning that ever since they were born, they seem to interact gently with people and behave so calmly and intuitively that after a few behaviors are taught in order to pass their certification test that they are ready to go in no time!

WHY do facilities utilize therapy dogs?

- There is science behind the benefits of canine interactive associations with people who are ill, injured, or dying as well as simple comfort and companionship.
- A visit from a therapy dog can spark memories of a past beloved pet which warms a person's heart and helps to build a dialog with those in their company.
- It has been clinically proven that through petting, touching and talking with the animals, that patients' blood pressure is lowered, stress is relieved and depression is eased.
- In addition to changes in blood pressure, there are those who suddenly attempt to move a limb or utter a word only when in the company of a beloved dog.
- Therapy dogs that are used for READING to DOGS programs offer a non judgmental ear and literally someone to lean on while children or adults struggle with reading aloud. Some adults or children have difficulty reading aloud to a human audience; they may be struggling with language difficulties or have fallen behind in their peer group, so reading aloud to a dog that lies at their feet and offers NO judgment can be a wonderful inspiration and comfort.

WHERE do therapy dogs go?

- A **therapy dog** and his/her owner visit hospitals, senior centers, assisted living, libraries and hospice. Some also are invited to private counseling sessions with professional mental health practitioners.
- Some visits are with groups and some with individuals.
- Some owners and their dogs get together with other therapy dog teams and visit together.
- Some facilities require formal orientations for owners of therapy dogs so that they are more comfortable and confident during their visits and learn what to say and what not to say, and how to handle various situations that may come up during their visits.
- **Certified therapy dogs** must carry ID with them on visits and be bathed and well groomed before all visits.

WHEN does a dog participate in therapy visits?

- Visits are setup through directors of facilities and you may decide to go every week at the same time and visit with the same individuals or a different person each time.
- Some facilities will offer instruction and specific understandings of procedures established by that particular facility

How do I qualify and certify my own dog for therapy work?

- Therapy dogs must be trained to pass the required testing that each individual therapy program expects.
- Expect to have your dog demonstrate basic obedience skills like sit, down, stay, come, and to also ignore other dogs and food when placed nearby.
- Owners can retest their dogs as often as you like until they pass.
- Each organization has its own testing criteria.
- Contact the organization of your choice and you will find a tester in your area.
- Contact the individual testers and schedule your test, which is often held at dog shows and fund raisers.
- You will need to be prepared for the test and bring necessary paperwork with you, such as proof of vaccines and local licensing.
- Once you have passed the test, your dog will become certified once paperwork is completed and your membership is paid
- Once certified, your dog will be listed as a certified therapy dog with that specific organization and you will be given an ID card and you may choose to have your dog wear a therapy dog vest as well

❖ ***Does my dog need a CGC (AKC Canine Good Citizen) certification as a prerequisite for testing and membership in a therapy dog program?***

The answer is NO. Although the testing for both are similar, the organizations are completely separate and have no affiliation with one another. Some people choose to have both certifications but I have seen dogs passing a CGC test while not being able to pass a therapy dog test. Therapy dog testing is a combination of obedience, energy and temperament so a dog with great obedience can mask an underlying energy or temperament by being a “soldier”, yet that same dog might knock over an IV pole, or show stress around moving wheelchairs, or not be able to be picked up or placed in the lap of a stranger.

What does my dog have to do in the test for therapy dogs?

- **Each organization** has their own testing criteria for participate and certification.
- **Each organization** has its' own policies regarding individual dog's vaccines and diet, since much has changed over the years in what we feed our dogs and how often or if we even vaccinate our dogs. (Some dogs are fed a raw or home cooked diets, and are not given yearly vaccines, but have titer checks instead)
- **Each organization** will expect a health exam be provided and that grooming is maintained in order to insure that visits will not compromise an individual's health.
- **Contact each organization** to find testers and facilities in your area that are looking for therapy dogs.
- **TDI (Therapy Dog International)** for example, has a test very similar to the AKC Canine Good Citizen test http://www.akc.org/events/cgc/training_testing.cfm . TDI adds that your dog will have to leave food alone when seeing it on the floor, they add crutches, wheelchairs or canes to those in the group of strangers mingling with your dog and if your dog is a toy breed, he/she may need to accept being petted while in someone's lap.
- **TDI Inc. (Therapy Dog Inc.)** asks that your dog demonstrate a few basic commands but then ask that you participate with your dog along with one of their testers in a few actual therapy dog visits. They concentrate more on temperament, attitude and energy levels more than detailed obedience demonstrations.
- **PRAAT (Patchogue Rotary Animal Assisted Therapy)** is quite different in that they test your dog's attitude and temperament FIRST by making an appointment for an evaluation. If your dog passes their temperament test, then you are to attend their free obedience classes and orientation in order to participate in their own therapy dog program and carry their own PRAAT insurance.
- **Delta Society** has a unique program that includes all kinds of animals in their therapy programs, NOT JUST DOGS.

Therapy organizations that have members here on Long Island are:

- Delta Society
<http://www.deltasociety.org>
- Therapy Dog International (TDI)
<http://www.tdi-dog.org>
- Therapy Dog Inc. (TD Inc)
<http://www.therapydogs.com>
- Patchogue Rotary Animal Assisted Therapy (PRAAT)
<http://www.praatinc.org>
- Therapy Programs around the country
<http://www.lidogdirectory.com/therapy.asp>