



TCC PAWS Team

Peace and Wellness through Dog Therapy®

Criteria for Prospective Therapy Dogs

Chris Center PAWS team dogs must meet the following criteria:

- Are at least one year old at the time of evaluation. Have a young animal? See our tips for preparing for future therapy work.
- Have lived in the owner's home for at least six months.
- Must be reliably house trained. Belly bands and other such apparel are not permitted.
- Be currently vaccinated against rabies. Per Indiana law, titers are not accepted in lieu of vaccination.
- Have no history of aggression or seriously injuring either people or other animals. This includes animals who have been trained to aggressively protect and/or have been encouraged to bite, even if it is a component of dog sport, such as Schutzhund. If you have a rescue animal and do not know definitively that your dog meets this requirement, we suggest you not put your dog in a situation where he may be triggered unexpectedly.
- Demonstrate good basic obedience skills. Animals walking with a lead should walk on a loose leash with basic collar or harness. Your dog should respond reliably to common commands such as "sit," "down," "stay," "come," and "leave it." No pinch collars may be used during therapy visits or your evaluation.
- Welcome, not merely tolerate, interactions with strangers.
- Be comfortable wearing a PAWS team bandana.

Animals with an Illness

Animal welfare and infection control are a priority. Asking animals to make therapy animal visits when they are not healthy increases stress and can lead to a worsened condition. Additionally,



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you may visit clients with compromised immune systems who would be at risk for transmission of zoonotic diseases.

If your animal is taking antibiotics, antifungals, or immunosuppressants (including steroid and chemotherapy medications), they will be unable to register and visit until they have finished treatment.

Animals with a Disability

The Chris Center PAWS Team does register some animals with disabilities. To be eligible for participation, the animal should be able to clearly express consent, actively participate in a visit, and not experience an aggravation of their medical condition as a result of volunteerism. If you are interested in registering with an animal with a disability, please contact us so we can discuss the specifics of your particular situation.

Criteria for Prospective Animal Handlers

Do You Inspire Confidence as a Therapy Animal Team?

After you've reviewed all the basic requirements, this is the question that will truly determine your ability to become a successful team. Therapy animals must inspire confidence in those they meet, so they should be **reliable, predictable, and controllable**. When you can predict your animal's reactions, you can take action to ensure a reliable response and maintain control of your animal in any situation. When clients and facility staff perceive that you're in control of your animal, they'll have confidence in you and your animal when you come for visits.

Successful handlers will be able to do the following:

- Read their animal's particular body language and recognize when their animal is stressed, anxious, concerned, overstimulated, or fatigued.
- Demonstrate positive interactions with their animal by praising, cueing, encouraging, and reassuring the animal as needed.



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- Cue or redirect their animal without raising their voice, forcefully jerking on the leash, or offering the animal food or toys.
- Make casual conversation with those they meet on visits while still being attentive to their animal.
- Guide the interactions of others with the animal in a professional and polite manner.
- Advocate for the safety and well-being of their animal at all times.
- Pass a criminal background check (for volunteers who are 18 years of age or older)

Therapy Animal Volunteers Who Are Minors

The Chris Center PAWS Team welcomes handlers as young as 14 years old. If you are under the age of 16, you must be accompanied on all visits by a parent/guardian or an adult appointed by the parent/guardian. All individuals under the age of 18 must have permission to participate from a parent or guardian, which is collected during the application process.

Therapy Animal Volunteers with a Disability

The Chris Center PAWS Team works with handlers with disabilities, including those with service animals. If your disability may require accommodations to the evaluation, please contact us and we'd be happy to discuss the specifics of your particular situation.

Therapy Animal Volunteers Who Don't Own the Therapy Animal

You may volunteer with the animal of a friend or family member, as long as you have known and been working with the animal for at least six months and have the permission of the animal owner. Effective therapy animal teams are based on a strong bond between the handler and the dog.