



PETS ON WHEELS of Scottsdale, Inc.

1700 North Granite Reef, Scottsdale, Arizona 85257

office: 480-312-1741

petsonwheelsaz@gmail.com

www.petsonwheelsscottsdale.com

Sharing Our Pets' Love

A GOOD THERAPY DOG

What makes a Good Therapy Dog?

Visiting dogs must be social. The point of the activity is the interaction between the dog and the people you are visiting. If the dog does not enjoy the visit, the interaction will be less than ideal. The person needs to feel accepted by the dog. A doggie rejection could make the visit more hurtful than no visit at all. A good therapy dog is calm, tolerant and friendly. The visits should be pleasurable for both of you. Don't try to force the therapy work on a dog.

Visiting dogs must be polite. It is rude for a person to challenge another for walking down a public street. The same is true for your dog. That it is natural for one dog to challenge another does not mean it's polite. It is also rude for one person to touch another without permission. How would you react if some stranger on the street walked up to you and kissed you? A polite dog does not touch a person unless invited.

The balance between calmness and friendliness is a difficult one. Even an excellent obedience dog may not be a good visiting dog if it shows little interest in meeting people. An aloof dog may be calm, but may cause people to feel rejected. An overly friendly dog may have the best of intentions but may cause injury. A dog that is full of energy and always ready to work may be too active for most situations.

Any breed of dog can participate. You may have one dog whose natural temperament makes it suitable. It is natural to that dog and is the reason you chose it to become involved. Your other dog may be as well schooled and as well socialized; however, its natural exuberance may not be well suited to these special visits. Maturity will probably make the difference.

Evaluate Your Dog's Personality.

The people your dog visits must be absolutely safe from your dog. The dog must be forgiving of both accidental and intentional pain that may be inflicted. It is your job to prevent injury to your dog, but the dog must not retaliate for your failure. Dog bites are not the only concern. Many of the people your dog visits are very fragile. Frail skin tears easily. A friendly paw on an arm can cause ugly red welts and your dog will be blamed. A "pet me" shove with a dog's nose or body can easily topple someone who is unsteady on their feet.

Is Your Dog Both Calm and Friendly?

In deciding whether to take your dog on visits honestly evaluate your dog's personality and social skills. How does your dog react to strangers on the street and in your home? Does your dog tend to jump up in friendly excitement? Does your dog pull back when someone extends their hand? Does your dog avoid being petted by strangers, or seek it out?

A good prospect for therapy work will enjoy meeting strangers, will actively approach, but in a clam manner. A dog that is so happy it jumps up, or pushes with feet, body or nose, will need some work before visiting can begin. A dog that is fearful or aggressive probably should not be considered for therapy work.

Does Your Dog Take Unusual Events, Sights and Sounds in Stride?

How does your dog react to unusual events? What happens when an alarm clock rings? Or the smoke alarm? Or some books fall off the shelf? Your dog should show interest in these unusual events, but readily calm. If the dog barks at a knock on the door, it should be quiet and under control when you open the door.

Does Your Dog Have Good Manners?

Will your dog walk on a lead without pulling? Will it sit or lie down when you tell it to do so? Can you hand the lead over to someone else and then leave without the dog pulling, or making a lot of noise? What happens when you walk past another person walking their dog?

Your dog must be reliable around dogs and other animals as well as people. In some situations it is not unusual to encounter a pet belonging to another visitor. Your dog must accept the presence of cats, guinea pigs, rabbits, birds and other animals as well as other dogs. You cannot count on the good manners of these other visiting animals.

By now you should have a general idea of what is required of a good therapy dog. Please remember that even if your dog is not ready now, that does not mean your dog will never be ready. If your dog is basically under control, and generally friendly, there is much you can do to help your dog get ready. In some cases it means simply waiting for your dog to mature.

How Can I Help My dog Become a Good Visitor?

A good basic obedience class is a good start but it is not enough. Your dog needs to feel comfortable amidst unfamiliar sights and sounds. A dropping bed pan or the slam of a door should elicit no more than casual curiosity from your dog. If your dog has good potential as a therapy dog, it is possible to help your dog get ready by building your dog's confidence and trust in you.

Take Your Dog Into a Variety of Situations.

Before you commit your time and ego to an evaluation you can enhance your dog's natural skills. Essentially this means building your dog's trust and confidence. You can commit yourself to taking your dog to a wide variety of environments and situations. I ask my dog to walk on a wobbly board, to sit on a grate, to climb bleachers or stadium stairs (because they are so open). The important thing is that the dog learns to trust my judgment. Go to a shopping area and walk around pushing a noisy shopping cart. Stand where people pushing carts will pass you. Your dog's trust in you is, perhaps, the most important factor for a safe enjoyable experience.

One of my favorite places to train is at a farmer's market. It is outdoors and very busy. Unlike the local park, the dogs we come across are always on lead so it makes for good practice. Also people tend not to ask before petting the dog, and it is often so crowded that passing people brush up against the dog. If your dog would have any problems in this situation, then it's is not ready for visiting.

There are classes designed to help introduce your dog to the unusual sights, sounds and smells encountered during therapy dog visits. Some books and other publications provide training guidelines. And joining a group helps provide impartial and personal guidance and evaluation.

Obtain a Canine Good Citizenship Certificate (CGC)

Have you and your dog obtained a Canine Good Citizenship Certificate? The Certificate is awarded if your dog passes a test demonstrating basic good manners. During the examination the dog must not show fear, aggression or excessive activity. The dog must sit, lie down, come, and stay on command, as well as walk on lead in a mannerly way. The positions are not as defined as formal obedience. A dog that passes isn't necessarily ready, but a dog that fails may not be ready for therapy work.

Some Groups require that you take the CGC test before they will evaluate the dogs. Others simply test the dogs themselves. Taking the test on your own is a good way to evaluate your dog. Tests are given frequently by various humane societies, and often at workshops, matches and other dog events. Check also with your local recreation department, or a local training club.

What Your dog Will Learn in a Basic Obedience Class.

On command: Sit, down, stay, stand, come when called, heal and walk mannerly on lead.