

## What is a Therapy Dog?

Therapy dogs bring comfort, support, love, and animal companionship to people of all ages in a variety of settings. Therapy dogs can be any breed, size, shape, and color. No one particular breed is specifically suited to therapy dog work – the correct temperament is most important. A therapy dog must love people and be well-socialized, even-tempered, calm, tolerant, and polite.

True therapy dogs are registered through a professional organization such as Therapy Dogs, Incorporated. Minimum age for testing is one year old. The testing process is thorough and dogs and handlers are tested on items related to environmental challenges, temperament, and team skills. Dogs being considered for therapy dog work should be able to:

- Willingly initiate contact with unfamiliar people
- Demonstrate good social skills and manners
- Function comfortably around medical equipment (hospital beds, wheelchairs, walkers, oxygen concentrators, bed alarms, etc.)
- Respond to cues in the midst of distractions
- Greet people politely with all four paws on the ground
- Calmly accept demonstrative affection from unfamiliar people in an unfamiliar setting
- Remain calm and well-controlled around other dogs

Therapy dog teams are comprised of a registered therapy dog and their handler functioning in a volunteer capacity. Therapy dog teams are prohibited from receiving compensation for their visits. **Therapy dogs are *not* service dogs and do not have the same access rights as assistance dogs dictated by the *Americans With Disabilities Act*. Misrepresentation of a therapy dog as an assistance dog can result in fines and jail time.**

## Where Do Therapy Dogs Visit?

Therapy dogs and their handlers are flexible and often visit people in many different environments, provided it is safe for all parties involved. They may visit:

- Hospice patients in a setting the patient calls “home”
- Skilled Nursing Facilities
- Assisted Living Facilities
- Community Based Residential Facilities
- Hospitals
- Grief Support Groups
- Public Libraries
- Schools
- Funeral Homes
- Mental Health Facilities

