

Policies Governing Member Activities & Visits

The terms “handler” and “member” within this document refer to the person who has undergone certification with the dog and who will be making visits. “Program” and “facility” refer to the location where the therapy dog team makes visits.

Membership/Certification

- Handlers must be 14 years of age or older. Facilities may have different age requirements.
- Dogs must have been tested and evaluated by TDV in order to achieve certified status; to keep this status current, membership must be renewed each year.
- Annual renewals: Members receive an annual membership renewal form requiring the dog's rabies record, if due, and membership fees. Each year that you renew your membership you will receive an updated sticker to attach to your dog's photo ID. If you do not renew by the established deadlines, you may be required to be re-tested and re-evaluated (at the rate of a first-time membership) before membership is re-established.
- Members must notify TDV (Admin@Therapydogs.org) before bringing their certified therapy dog to any facility in order to be covered by TDV liability insurance. This information is kept in our database.
- All dogs engaging in visits must have a current membership with TDV and must wear the TDV photo identification tag with current sticker and the TDV bandanna. Failure to do so will void TDV liability insurance.
- A dog may wear the logo or identification of only one organization at a time. The wearing of more than one will void TDV liability insurance.
- Members may not use TDV's logo on communications or publications of any kind without express TDV permission.
- All certified teams are expected to become active volunteers. TDV does not certify dogs solely for community/school projects, short-term community service requirements, rental housing agreements, travel requirements, etc.
- Members must not use affiliation with TDV or certification status for any financial or professional gain.
- Certification may not be used to gain rights typically reserved for service dogs, such as access to non-dog friendly establishments, airlines, housing that restricts dogs, etc.
- Dogs in the Workplace: A dog is only considered “working” as a therapy dog when on a leash, wearing TDV identification, and all therapy dog policies are followed. During visits, the handler's primary focus must be on the therapy dog work. *Bringing a dog to the office for a full workday does not qualify as therapy dog work.* TDV members are expected to clearly communicate to their employers the distinction between volunteering as a therapy dog and a dog simply being present in the workplace. If an employer requires documentation to allow a dog in the office, TDV **does not and will not** provide certification documentation. If volunteering as a therapy dog, volunteers should use their standard-issued TDV badge. When not officially working, the dog should **not** display TDV identification. Further, both handler and employer assume full responsibility for the dog's behavior. *Please see Appendix A for more information.*
- Visits to private residences: Due to liability and personal safety concerns, TDV prohibits therapy dog visits to private residences. For example, TDV is not able to accommodate private, in-home visits requested by an individual or an agency/facility. Some exceptions may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Members, while engaged in therapy dog visits or activities organized by TDV, are covered for incidents caused by their dogs to others, by TDV liability insurance for up to \$1,000,000, after first utilizing their homeowner's insurance as first payer.
- TDV may revoke certification/membership at any time if policies are not followed or the dog poses a perceived threat.

Policies Related to Dogs

- Minimum requirements for certification: dog must be at least one year of age, living with the owner for at least 6 months, not on a raw meat diet, and not a hybrid of any kind.
- TDV does not discriminate against specific breeds of dogs. However, TDV's experience and expertise in the assessment, certification, and handling of therapy animals is focused on and restricted to domestic canines. Thus, TDV does not certify other species such as cats, horses, ferrets, and wild canine hybrid crosses.
- Dogs must be current with the rabies vaccination. If your pet has any signs of infection or illness, do not make visits. This includes not only physical symptoms such as diarrhea, runny nose, or crusting or weeping eyes but also includes times when your dog is not acting like his/her normal self, not eating, sleeping more, or is reluctant to undertake normal behaviors. Should you have any questions regarding your dog's ability to participate in visits, please E-mail admin@therapydogs.org or talk with your veterinarian.
- Female dogs must not be “in season” when doing therapy dog work.
- Dogs must be on a leash (4' or less). Please note that “flexi leads”, retractable leashes, and chain leashes (or ones that are partial chain link) are not acceptable.

- Although a handler may have more than one TDV-certified dog, each dog on duty must have one handler.
- Dogs must be clean, well-groomed and free of fleas, ticks and other parasites; toenails should be short and not ragged or sharp.
- Dogs must not be treated with oily flea treatment (e.g. Top Spot etc.) within one week of a visit.
- If a dog experiences any changes in behavior (fear, aggression, etc.) or health conditions (blindness, loss of hearing, pain, etc.) the handler must consult TDV and, if necessary, retire the dog from therapy dog work.
- For safety reasons, we do not permit the use of the following pieces of equipment (either during the certification process or when dogs are volunteering as TDV therapy dog teams): spraying collars (such as citronella), electric/shock collars, vibrating collars, spray bottles or spraying devices of any kind, clickers and other noise-making devices; prong/pinch collars of any type, choke chains or nylon choke collars, and head halters of any type. Any collar or item that goes around a dog's neck should have a quick-release buckle or function. TDV reserves the right to prohibit any piece of training equipment should it be deemed unsafe or not conducive to the image and/or work of TDV.

Safety and Proper Conduct During Visits

- Handlers must always have control over their dogs and dogs must be closely supervised. Dogs must always be on the required leash (four feet or less) and be handled by the certified handler.
- Handlers are responsible for understanding the facility's regulations and following them.
- Footwear: Enclosed shoes are mandatory (no flip flops, open-toed shoes, shoes that expose major parts of the foot, etc.). This is for the protection of the handler (as needles, blood, feces, etc. may be present on the floors of facilities).
- Handlers must check in with staff or supervisor of each facility or hospital unit they visit. Ask whether there are any patients/residents that you may not visit.
- Patient confidentiality must always be respected. Do not mention to anyone that you saw a patient in the hospital, do not share any personal or health information you may learn while visiting a facility, and do not take photos of patients. Facilities may have their own confidentiality policies. Please check with them for further requirements.
- Persons not tested and evaluated with the dog may NOT handle the dog on any therapy dog visits; the dog must only be handled by the person who was tested and evaluated with it.
- Only tested and evaluated dogs may make visits; other dogs the handler may own or be associated with may not be used as a substitute for making visits by wearing the certified dog's identification.
- In order to honor and respect the diversity, values, and belief systems of the people we visit, TDV teams must not initiate/engage in conversations which could become potentially controversial subjects involving politics, religion, moral, or spiritual beliefs while on therapy dog duty and while representing TDV.
- Never enter Intensive Care or a room that has an isolation sign on the door without the permission of the staff. Each facility marks such rooms in a different way. You must get to know how your facility does so. Generally, patients who are critically ill (ICU patients) or immunocompromised (AIDS, cancer, etc.) should not be visited. Use caution in visiting with patients just out of surgery. Consult with the facility on what types of patients may or may not be able to receive visits.
- Always exercise careful hygiene and infection control practices. The individual rooms of many facilities are equipped with antiseptic sprays or wipes which are used by the staff. This prevents bringing germs into a facility, passing germs from patient to patient, and for the volunteer carrying germs out.
- Never give food or beverage to patients, even if they ask. Likewise, never move or reposition a patient or their medical equipment. Find a staff member.
- Avoid wearing perfumes/colognes. Patients can be very sensitive to smell, and some may have serious allergies.
- Always ask the patient's permission before you visit with them or bring the dog into his or her room. Be mindful that some people are afraid of, or allergic to, dogs.
- During a visit, make sure the door is always open. Some facilities may have their own procedures for making visits, such as providing a list of acceptable patients.
- Do not interfere with normal or emergency activity of the facility. Should medical staff need to work with a patient, excuse yourself politely and quickly. Likewise, avoid making a visit if medical staff is working with a patient.
- Whether or not to let your dog accept treats when visiting is a personal choice. However, please be VERY aware of how gentle your dog is when doing so. If your dog has ANY chance of catching a finger with his teeth or grabbing at the food in earnest, consider taking the treat from the patient to give to the dog yourself. Feeding a dog treats may be prohibited by some facilities for infection control and hygiene reasons.
- Be prepared with proper material to quickly clean up after your dog if it vomits, urinates or defecates within the facility or the grounds.
- Dogs should never get on a bed, lap etc. unless invited by the patient and permitted by the facility, and if the handler can assure the patient's safety and comfort while doing so.

- Never let your dog lick any wound. Licking a patient's face should be avoided.
- When making visits, please turn off the cell phones! It's a distraction to being able to work with your dog safely and it's a common courtesy to the people we visit.
- Keep your dog's nose off the floor and be aware of what your dog may ingest or step on. There may be items such as needles, pills, rubber gloves, tissues, bodily fluids, or other waste products on the floor or in garbage.
- Therapy dog teams working together should greet outside the facility before going in for visits.
- Observe the needs of your dog. If your dog appears hot, tired or otherwise disinterested, end the visit and go back another time. Any dog has the potential for becoming aggressive or exhibiting aggressive behaviors if stressed, ill, injured, or fearful. The handler is the dog's protector and must always be aware of the dog's reactions. The handler's job is to ensure a safe and happy experience for both dog and patient.

Appendix A. Guidelines for TDV Members Bringing Dogs to Work

We are aware that some individuals choose to bring their dogs to their places of work. This includes scenarios such as teachers bringing their dogs to school, medical personnel bringing their dogs to medical offices, and even business owners allowing dogs in office or retail environments. The presence of therapy dogs in the workplace can yield several benefits for employees, their canine companions, and visitors. However, it is imperative to prioritize the comfort and safety of everyone involved. With that in mind, we have developed a concise guide that provides essential considerations for therapy dog members. By following these guidelines, you can ensure a positive and secure work environment.

Therapy Dogs of Vermont Policies Related to Dogs in the Workplace

At TDV, we recognize the distinction between having your dog in your office as a companion and when your dog is actively working as a therapy dog. This differentiation holds significant importance because when your dog is fulfilling the role of a therapy dog, it is crucial for the handler to fully adhere to all therapy dog policies and guidelines. By understanding and respecting this distinction, we can ensure that the expectations surrounding therapy dog responsibilities are met with the utmost diligence.

Specifically, our policies state:

- If the dog is accompanying the handler to the handler's place of business or to visit family/friends in a facility, this may not be considered as a TDV visit unless the dog is always on leash and with the handler. The dog must also be wearing the TDV photo identification tag with a current sticker and the TDV bandanna.
- Handlers must always have control over their dogs and dogs must be closely supervised. Dogs must always be on the required leash (four feet or less) and be handled by the certified handler.

When your dog is officially working as a therapy dog, you must adhere to all TDV policies. For example, your dog should be on a four-foot leash and wearing its TDV identification. During therapy dog visits, your primary focus should be on the visit itself. However, when your dog is not fulfilling its therapy dog duties and not following all of TDV's policies, it should not wear the TDV identification nor be identified in any way as a Therapy Dog of Vermont. While your dog may still provide comfort when it is simply in the room with you, it is only considered officially working as a therapy dog when the aforementioned guidelines are in place. When your dog is not officially working as a therapy dog in your place of work, both you and your employer hold liability for any incidents that may occur.

Tips for Dogs (therapy dogs or not) in the Workplace

Bringing your dog to workplace can be beneficial, so we're offering a few tips to prioritize everyone's comfort and safety.

Understand Your Dog's Experience/Dog Comfort and Safety

- Understand your dog's body language so you can recognize fear, anxiety, stress, or aggression for timely intervention.
- Provide a comfortable resting area for your dog.
- Prioritize regular exercise and mental stimulation outside the office.
- Ensure a suitable temperature and ventilation.
- Be aware of potential hazards and dog-proof the workspace.
- Schedule regular breaks and monitor noise levels.

Evaluate the Workplace Environment

- Check for allergies or phobias among colleagues.
- Review company policies regarding animals in the office.
- Assess space availability, safety, and amenities for dogs.

Gradual Introductions

- Inform colleagues about your dog's presence, explaining therapy dogs' purpose and benefits.
- Introduce your dog gradually to small groups of colleagues.
- Increase exposure to the office environment over time.

Set Clear Boundaries

- Define dog-friendly areas and off-limit spaces.
- Keep your dog on a leash or tethered while in the office.

Respect Coworkers

- Obtain consent before bringing your dog near colleagues.
- Be mindful of colleagues with allergies or discomfort.
- Minimize disruptions and provide a quiet space if needed.
- Encourage feedback from colleagues and address any concerns promptly.

Hygiene and Cleanliness

- Regularly groom and clean your dog.
- Promptly clean up after them and dispose of waste properly.
- Maintain a clean workspace to minimize allergens.