

Therapy Dogs of Vermont Certification Packet

Thank you for your interest in becoming a certified Therapy Dogs of Vermont team! This packet contains all you need for the certification process. Please read these materials in their entirety.



Fees

Non-Refundable Testing fee: \$45

The testing fee is non-refundable. However, you may reschedule your test up to three times without forfeiting your fee as long as you notify us at least 48 hours in advance of the test so that we may offer your appointment to another waiting candidate.

If you satisfy all the certification requirements, the fee will be applied toward the first-year membership.

First Year Membership/Certification fee: \$80

Covers up to TWO household family members tested and evaluated at the same time with ONE dog.

Membership fees provide supplemental insurance coverage while on TDV visitations and TDV sponsored events, newsletters and member-exclusive communications, 1 TDV bandanna, 1 TDV dog tag, 1 TDV bumper sticker, photo identification/membership card, and ability to participate in any and all TDV sponsored events. Renewal of membership is yearly.

Preparing for Your Test

1. Review this entire certification packet.
2. Complete all of the online forms **AT LEAST THREE BUSINESS DAYS BEFORE YOUR TEST.**

Important

- Handler must have completed all online forms at least 3 days before the test and must arrive on-time for the test. Not having the required paperwork or being late will result in having to reschedule the test to another day.
- The dog must outwardly show that it wants to interact with certification team members, not merely tolerate interactions.
- Safety is of paramount importance when doing therapy dog work. Therefore, if a dog shows aggressive or dangerous behavior toward a person or another dog, this will result in immediate dismissal from the test. The dog will not be permitted to re-test and the testing fee will not be refunded. Dangerous behavior includes, but is not limited to, snarling, growling, lunging, hard stare, and rigid or frozen body posture.
- 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 our organization.

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.
- TDV Covid Policy: In order to attend TDV certifications or clinics, attendees need to have received the following:
 - 2 COVID SHOTS (Moderna & Pfizer)
 - 1 COVID SHOT (Johnson & Johnson)
 - Boosters are encouraged but not required. Facilities and programs visited by therapy dogs as part of the evaluation process and as certified members may have additional vaccination 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.
- 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.
- 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 current sticker and the TDV bandanna.
- 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. Guide to TDV Certification Standards

Working Relationship and Understanding

Even though training and educating a dog is an ongoing process, TDV expects teams to have a solid foundation in obedience and a positive working relationship when they come to us.

We look for mutual respect—a dog and handler that understand each other and a handler who can communicate what is expected to the dog. The use of any food treats (or toys used as reward) is prohibited during the test/evaluations as the purpose is to determine if the dog is responsive to the handler without the use of special incentives.

Handler awareness of the dog's reactions and needs is critical to conducting safe and happy visits for everyone. Handlers are expected to have an acute awareness of their dog's reactions at all times during visits, understanding how to identify stress, fear, anxiety, and aggression so that they can appropriately intervene (end the visit, change the situation to make the dog more comfortable, etc.).

A dog who is not feeling well, aging, or is injured may also act differently. Your dog may not want to visit for a number of reasons, and it may tire more easily than at home. Any dog can show signs of withdrawal and even aggression/fear if pushed beyond its comfort level. Dogs must never be forced into any situation that places undue stress on them or makes them uncomfortable.

Explanation of Standards by Test Section

The test follows in Appendix C.

I. Arrival and Check-in

- Being able to control the dog under normal as well as unexpected circumstances is critical. Teams will often encounter unexpected situations/noises/human behaviors.
- Both handler and dog must be well groomed, and handler must be dressed appropriately, as if they were on an actual volunteer visit. This demonstrates professionalism.
- Handler must come prepared with the required paperwork and must arrive on-time for the test. Failure to have the necessary paperwork or to be on-time will result in the team having to reschedule their test to another day.

II. Obedience, Manners, and Handling

- This part of the test shows that the dog has good manners and solid training. The dog must readily respond to handler's commands—without force (this includes pushing or pulling the dog's body into place).
- It is expected that a handler is able to keep the dog under control at all times. If the dog needs to be corrected or redirected, this must be fair, gentle, and constructive. Handler and dog should work as a team and praise should be given when the dog is performing as requested.
- The handler should always be aware of where the dog is and what it is doing (for example, not letting it wander too close to another dog).
- The handler must not drop the leash at any time.
- The dog must not jump on anyone at any time.

III. Behavior and Reaction to People and New Experiences

- During this phase, the dog will be exposed to a range of experiences, such as umbrellas, walkers and crutches, noisemakers, the approach of an oddly dressed stranger, etc. The certification team will

also interact with the dog to assess if the dog is accepting of touch and interaction and if the dog is SOCIAL with new people.

- The dog will be assessed based on its reaction to experiences presented at the test as well as interactions with the certification team. A dog must not be fearful, shy, or aggressive, and if stressed, must recover quickly.
- Safety is of paramount importance when doing therapy dog work. Therefore, if a dog shows aggressive or dangerous behavior toward a person or another dog, this will result in immediate dismissal from the test. The dog will not be permitted to re-test and the testing fee will not be refunded. Dangerous behavior includes, but is not limited to, snarling, growling, lunging, hard stare, and rigid or frozen body posture.
- The dog must outwardly show that it wants to interact with the certification team member, not merely tolerate the interaction.

IV. Behavior Around Other Dogs

- Since teams often work in the presence of other teams, it is important that all therapy dogs are focused on their therapy task, and not interested in interacting with other dogs.
- The dog must be able to greet other dogs briefly on leash, and work near each other without either excitement or aggression/fear.
- The handler must be able to anticipate his/her dog's response to other dogs and respond proactively.
- Safety is of paramount importance when doing therapy dog work. Therefore, if a dog shows aggressive or dangerous behavior toward a person or another dog, this will result in immediate dismissal from the test. The dog will not be permitted to re-test and the testing fee will not be refunded. Dangerous behavior includes, but is not limited to, snarling, growling, lunging, hard stare, and rigid or frozen body posture.

V. Additional Dog-to-Human Interactions

- This part of the test continues to assess whether the dog has suitable social skills and temperament for interacting with people. Testers examine body language, manners, sociability, and temperament.
- It is important that dogs are engaged and social during interactions with the certification team and people they visit.
- Dogs must also not jump on anyone, or paw at anyone. Dogs should also not engage in other behaviors that may not be suitable for the visitation environment (such as excessive sniffing, licking, etc.)

VI. Explanation of Standards for In-Facility Evaluations

- The evaluation stage of the certification process takes place after a team has passed the Therapy Dog Test. It examines how the team performs together in an actual visitation setting. It is critical that the handler is always in control of the dog and the team continue to meet all the requirements described above. Dog and handler's response are both being evaluated here. The dog must be responsive to strangers in a friendly, positive way. The handler must be friendly. The handler is also being assessed for ability to: manage the dog; interact appropriately and professionally with patients, staff, etc.; and understand and follow all policies.
- The use of any food treats (or toys used as reward) is prohibited during the test/evaluations as the purpose is to determine if the dog can be controlled by the handler without the use of special incentives.

Appendix B. TDV Training Philosophy and Acceptable Equipment

TDV recommends and supports positive-based training approaches and the humane training of dogs.

The dog/handler relationship is key to TDV's activities. TDV-certified dogs work in close proximity to a wide range of people. The settings and policies of the facilities and organizations we serve may differ, but in every situation the handler's ability to guide, calm, and control his or her dog is of paramount importance. Our training and team evaluation policies are designed to ensure the safety of the dogs, handlers, and patients and to enhance the therapeutic success of TDV visits.

As previously stated, TDV expects that teams have a solid foundation in obedience and a positive working relationship involving training, socialization, trust, and respect. Handlers are expected to understand his or her dog's behavior (including stress signals, reactions to the visitation experience, etc.). From this foundation, TDV works with each team to ensure a safe and positive visitation experience.

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 must 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.

Each TDV team is carefully evaluated. Teams coming for testing and evaluating must meet all standards of behavior. When we are evaluating teamwork and training, we are seeking a balance in approach and attitude. We look for:

- Mutual respect—a dog and handler that understand each other.
- Handlers who can communicate what is expected to their dog.
- Handlers who are aware of the dog's reactions and needs.
- Handlers who will support the dog or remove it from a difficult situation—for instance if the dog becomes nervous or overwhelmed by a large crowd of children.
- Appropriate guidance by the handler, including sensitivity and moderation in training.

Appendix C. TDV Certification Test and Evaluation Criteria

I. Arrival and Check-in
Is the handler in control of the dog upon entering the test location? (e.g. dog not pulling handler, not barking or whining at other dogs, not jumping on people)
Is the handler professional and presentable?
Is the dog clean and well-groomed?
Did the handler arrive on-time and with required paperwork?
II. Obedience, Manners, and Handling
Is the dog able to walk close to the handler's side, on a loose leash, and at different paces and with direction changes?
Is the dog able to perform a brief sit- or down-stay?
Is the dog able to leave/pass by a desired object or food treat when asked to do so?
Are there issues with too much sniffing, pawing, licking, head butting, barking, whining, or other inappropriate behavior?
Is the dog able to remain quietly at the handler's side (even with distractions)?
Does the team give the overall impression of control and professionalism?
Is the handler aware of the dog's behavior and position in all situations (e.g., not letting the dog get close to other dogs, keeping the dog close to him/her)?
Is the dog responsive to handler? Does handler have full and <u>willing</u> control of the dog without physical manipulation or
III. Behavior/Reaction to People and New Experiences
<i>Is the dog able to remain calm, non-aggressive/reactive, and in-control upon encountering?</i>
Loud, sudden, and/or strange noises?
Various objects and experiences (wheelchair, crutches, umbrella, moving objects, etc.)?
An oddly dressed and behaving stranger?
A person approaching the handler (shaking a hand, patting the handler on the arm, or standing close to the handler)?
<i>Is the certification team able to:</i>
Touch the dog's head and face?
Touch all of the dog's body?
Hold the tail?
Hold each of the paws?
Scratch the throat under the chin?
Gently pet and stroke the ears?
Lean over the dog?
Place a hand on dog's back and stroke down the back several times?
Lift the lips several times?
Hold and put gentle pressure on the collar/leash?
Approach the dog in different ways—rapidly and directly? from behind? bump into the dog lightly?
Make direct eye contact for several minutes?
Pat and touch the dog exuberantly, noisily, and clumsily?
Hug the dog?
Pat the dog at the same time with another person?
Crowd around the dog and stand near the handler (as if in an elevator)?

III. Behavior/Reaction to People and New Experiences

Is the handler aware of the dog's body language, stress level, and reactions to the testing situations and certification team?

Is the dog social? Does the dog want to engage with the certification team and enjoy the touch and attention? (Or is the dog merely tolerating the interactions?)

IV. Behavior Around Other Dogs

Dogs should be assessed for ability to work near other dogs at the test and not greet; before evaluations, dogs will be asked to greet each other briefly on leash.

Does the handler demonstrate having control over the dog in the presence of other dogs?

Is the handler aware of the dog's reaction to, and body language around, other dogs and proactively handle the dog?

Does the dog bark or lunge at other dogs? (even if non-aggressively)?

Is the dog able to work calmly in the presence of other dogs?

Are any other signs of aggression/inappropriate interest displayed (e.g., staring, posturing)?

V. Additional Dog-to Human Interactions

Does the handler demonstrate having control when the dog is greeting people (e.g., in wheelchairs, standing, on crutches)?

Is dog able to take a treat gently?

Does the dog jump on people or paw at them?

Is the dog willing to engage in interactions with people?

Does the dog display any signs of aggression or avoidance?

Are there signs of stress, fear, or shyness?

VI. In-Facility Evaluation Visits *(Three visits must be completed within six months of the test date.)**Observing the handler:*

Does the handler have the required 4-foot leash?

Did the handler review the required reading prior to the first evaluation?

Is the handler able to keep the dog close and in control during the entire visitation and in all situations (including working around the other teams)?

Is the handler professional, respectful, and friendly during the visit? Is the handler sensitive to situations where a person may not want or be able to engage in a visit?

Does the handler demonstrate a thorough understanding of the guidelines and adhere to them during the visits?

Is handler aware of dog's needs, body language, stress, reactions, etc.?

Is the handler aware of surroundings (e.g., obstacles, medical equipment, other dogs) and potential dangers (e.g., pills or food on the floor, a dog's paw under a wheelchair, an isolation sign on a patient's door)?

Observing the dog:

If initially excited, does the dog calm down and respond to handler?

Is the dog willing to participate in the visits? Is the dog engaged and social, not merely tolerating visits?

Is the dog clean and well-groomed?

Does the dog bark, whine, or create noise to the point of being disruptive?

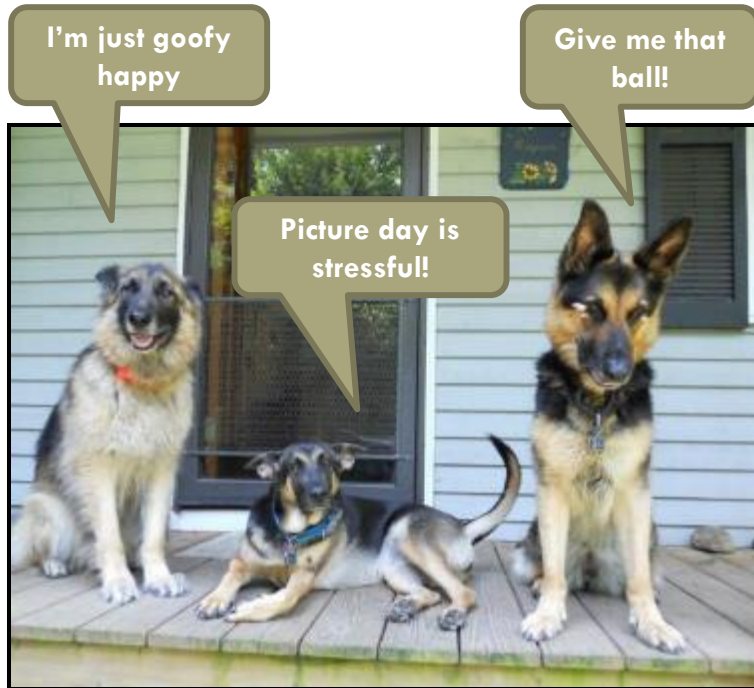
Does the dog show any signs of: stress, fear, aggression, reactivity, shyness, avoidance?

Is the dog able to work calmly near other dogs? Can the dog greet other dogs (also participating in evaluations) briefly, on leash without aggression or reactivity?

Appendix D. Understanding Dog Body Language

The ability to understand how dogs communicate with their bodies is important to the success and safety of therapy dog teams. Please review the dog communication material beginning on the next page.

A Dog Communication Primer

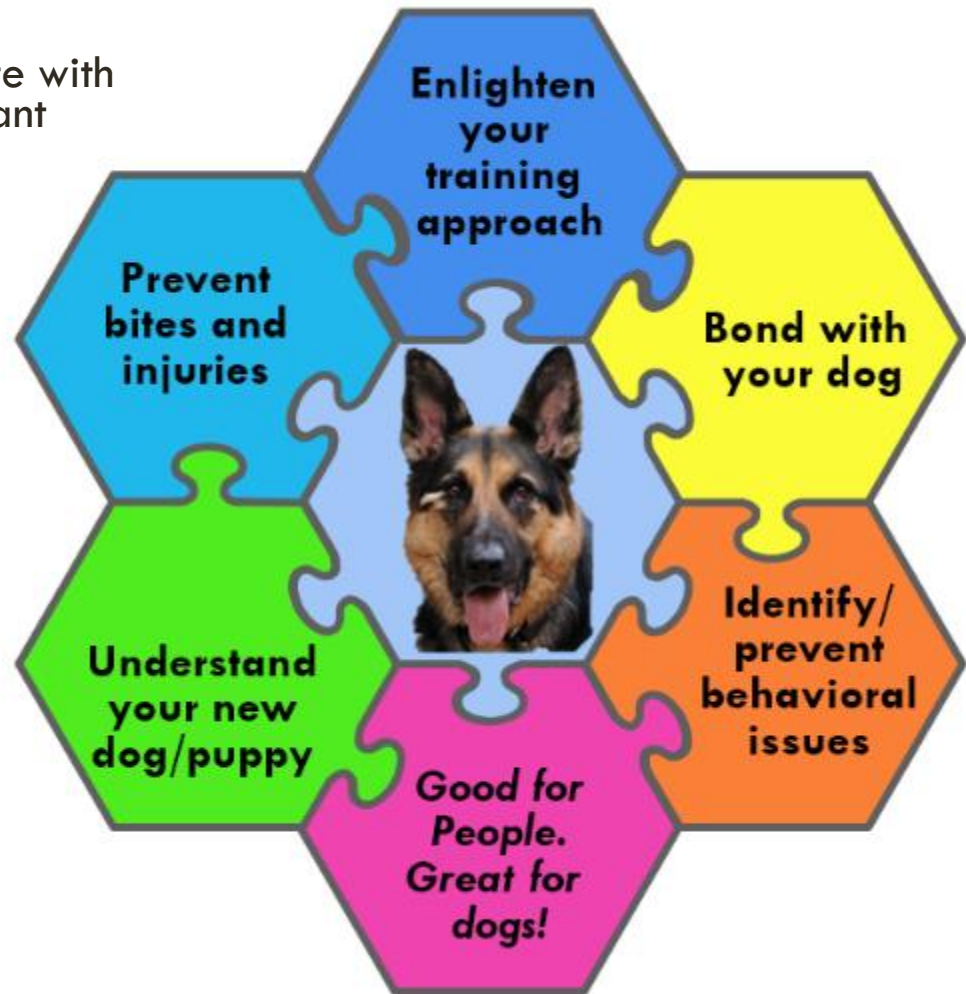



GOLD STAR
Dog Training
www.goldstardog.com



Benefits

Understanding how dogs communicate with their bodies provides several important benefits—for humans and dogs.



Communication & Understanding

- Dogs and humans communicate in very different ways.
- Understanding how dogs communicate allows us to better understand how they interpret the world, view us and others, learn, cope, and fit in.
- Dogs can't say "I hate this bath" or "I'm happy being here"...at least not verbally. But, they do tell us with body language and vocalizations.
- Dogs have limited choices for dealing with negative situations
 - Run away (escape and avoid)
 - Shut down (detach emotionally, go to a happy place)
 - Warn and react (growling, biting, attacking—taking action to communicate and then defend themselves)



Does this dog look like he wants to interact?

Don't Ignore (or Punish) a Dog's Communication!

A dog who is walking away, showing body tension, even growling, baring teeth, or snapping is TRYING TO COMMUNICATE. If a dog does these things to us, we may feel angry or afraid—and want to punish such behavior. These feelings are normal, but we don't want to act on them.

Punishing, scolding, intimidating, making the dog obey, or showing such a dog who is boss for these warnings can have devastating consequences. The dog may stop warning (skipping a growl and going straight to a bite). And, such methods do nothing to address the underlying reasons for the dog's behavior; so, even if punitive methods *seem* to work (the dog stops growling when you smack it), all it does is suppress the communication, and in the long run may intensify the underlying issues.

For example, if little Bobby is afraid of the dentist, we probably wouldn't blame the parent for not being authoritative enough or for having a naughty child. And, if that parent told little Bobby to buck-up, and slapped him when he cried, do you think that would make visits to the dentist any easier? Maybe Bobby would become too afraid to issue a peep, but he's certainly going to remain terrified of the dentist. Or, maybe Bobby will have an even bigger meltdown next time he's at the dentist. This isn't very far off from dealing with a dog's negative reactions to whatever may be causing him to growl or show other signals.

Happy Warm Fuzzies ☺



Relaxed, Happy Body Language

- Tail carriage normal
- Loose sweeping tail wag
- Ear carriage normal, relaxed, or inquisitive
- Mouth open with muzzle relaxed
- Squinty, soft eyes
- Relaxed body stance
- Smile—relaxed jaw, tongue hanging out (but not curved up at the end)
- Alert and engaged but not tense
- Curious and interested
- Doesn't move away from touch
- Willing to engage

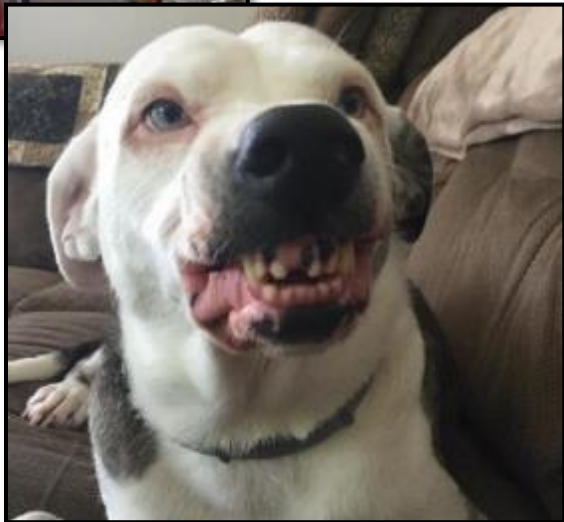
Observe your dog when s/he's in his most familiar place and with people s/he likes—what do his/her eyes, tail, ears, face, and body look like?

Not Warm & Fuzzy

Some body language is very clear...



Stay away!



Some body language is more subtle...



Lowered ears, worried eyes, muzzle closed

Lip-licking



Deconstructing Body Language

Dogs communicate (both consciously and unconsciously) for many reasons—to appease, avoid confrontation, express fear, communicate unease or dislike, or to keep someone or something away.

When attempting to understand what a dog may be feeling and thinking, try this three-pronged approach.

1. Observe each part of the dog's body (e.g., ears, tail, mouth);
2. Observe the dog's entire body (if we only look at one body part, we may miss critical information and misinterpret individual body language signals; and
3. Consider the context (i.e., what might the dog be reacting to, what may be new or different in the environment?).

Some of the more common signals that a dog may exhibit when feeling stressed, uncomfortable, fearful, and/or defensive are listed on the next page.



A sweet interaction caught at a farmer's market. While there is nothing concerning in the dog's body language (note the relaxed face, open mouth, tongue hanging out), some dogs may not be as receptive to such direct body language from a little person.

The Dog's Eye View—the Only Viewpoint That Matters

You and your dog are taking a stroll in the woods. As your dog looks ahead, his body grows tense, his eyes are locked onto something; he starts barking furiously.

Reaching for your bear spray, you anticipate a grizzly charge based on your dog's extreme reaction...

A fallen log that wasn't there yesterday juts up from the forest floor—and your dog is furiously communicating—warning you to RUN!

You look at your dog—an animal with finely honed senses and instincts, and you have to laugh. THAT'S what you were afraid of?

Your dog doesn't think it's all that funny—he was still startled and scared by what in his mind was unfamiliar. Your dog's reaction may make no sense to you, but it does to him.

“I’m Not Comfortable” Indicators

These signals are grouped by purpose, but signals don’t always fit into neat categories (ones that commonly bridge two categories are positioned between the two lists below). Signals can carry different meanings based on context, additional body language signals, and other factors. Also be aware that behavior can quickly move from one state to another (for example, avoidance to). If the categories seem confusing or difficult to remember, think of these signals as a dog saying “I’m not comfortable”.

Appeasement and/or Displacement	Stress, Discomfort, Nervousness, Fear	Defensive and/or Offensive
<p><i>The dog is trying to avoid confrontation, show deference, demonstrate she is not a threat, and/or de-escalate situation.</i></p>	<p><i>Signs a dog may be experiencing a wide range of uncomfortable situations—from discomfort to outright fear.</i></p>	<p><i>When all other signals have been ignored, the dog has no other choice but to amplify its message. A defensive dog backed into a corner or pushed too far may have no choice but to go on the offensive.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Muzzle licking (to another dog or human) – Jumping up, crawling on, the owner – Excessive blinking – Averting the eyes – Turning face and/or body away – Rolling over on back (withdrawing from interaction, not seeking attention) <p><i>The below are mostly associated with displacement behaviors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sneezing – Pacing – Sniffing (the ground, other things) – Licking (people, dogs, itself, objects) – Scratching – Playing/play bowing 	<p>Lowered head, ears, and/or body Tail tucked/low tail carriage Lifting a paw Lip licking Yawning Shaking off</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Excessive shedding – Sudden appearance of dandruff – Wide-eyed/whale eye, shifty eyes – Rounded back, head lowered – Inability to eat or take a treat – Less responsive to cues, difficulty with learning – Curved tongue (end of tongue is curved upward) – Panting, shaking, drooling – Sweaty paws – Whining – Body odor – Diarrhea or vomiting – Dog tries to make itself look small – Hiding, shrinking, withdrawing – Leaning or moving away to avoid 	<p>Hackles (piloerection) Facial tension Mouth shut Barking Hard, direct stares</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Leaning forward – Direct, forward stance – Freezing, stillness – Puckered mouth – Bared teeth – Growling – Air snapping or snapping at – Nipping (not in play, excitement) – Stiff, slow movements – Stiff, upright tail (may be wagging slowly) – Biting – Holding breath

Bodies

Defensive/offensive mode. Notice the forward body posture, stiff tail, the intensity of the stare and the tension in mouth and face. Contrast this with the photo of the dog below.

Don't hurt me...Notice the lowered body posture, as if attempting to make herself look small. Put this together with the paw lift, the ears being down and back, the tension in the face and worried/shifty eyes. Contrast this with the photo of the dog on the right.



Can You Imagine...

You are repeatedly being hurt, teased, or put in frightening situations. You try to tell others, you try asking for help, but you don't have the language to do so, and so no one understands. Nothing changes. One day, you can't take it anymore—and you strike back with a hard punch. Everyone is shocked and punishes you; even worse, they may send you away...you are labeled “violent”. Sadly, this is the experience of many dogs.

Faces



Soft, attentive gaze



Worried ears and eyes



Alert and happy



Frightened, unsure



Relaxed, happy grin, soft squinty eyes



Avoidance and warning (dog on left)



I'm OK



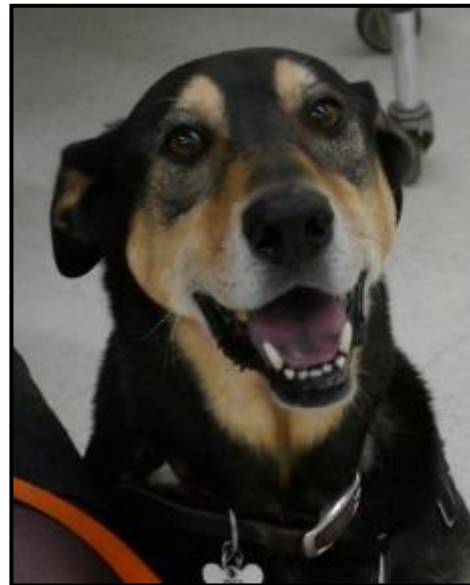
I'm not OK

Faces

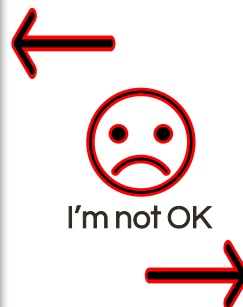
1: Soft,
attentive gaze



3: Engaged,
inviting



2: Unhappy,
uncomfortable



4: Unsure, a bit
tense



Eyes



Eyes can speak volumes. These photos display eye characteristics that may mean a dog is uncomfortable or stressed—wide eyes, whale eyes, hard and/or fixed stares.



Double-Duty Signals

Some signals can have more than one meaning. The behaviors below are listed on the prior page as being an "I'm not comfortable" signal. But they are also a few examples of signals that do double duty in terms of meaning—and can easily become lost in translation.

- Paw lifts can be a sign of anticipation ("oooh that treat looks good", excitement ("throw the ball!"), or alertness ("I know there's a critter in that bush!).
- A dog may have hackles (hair standing up on all or part of it's neck/back) if s/he is surprised/startled, overstimulated, uncertain, or excited (some dogs raise hackles during play).
- When a dog shakes off, s/he may be wet. If a dog yawns, s/he might simply be tired or content. These signals also help a dog de-stress (think about how calming a deep breath feels to us).
- Several displacement behaviors—sneezing, sniffing, scratching—can actually be normal physical reactions. The dog sneezes from an itch in the nose, sniffs because there's a new smell, or scratches because s/he's itchy.
- When a dog looks or turns away, he may be telling another dog (or you) that he's done interacting, or that the other dog is being a pest! ("Say it to the hand").

Observing other parts of the dog's body, and considering the context/situation, will help you sort out what a behavior means.



*Reward shake-offs and yawns;
these are signs your dog is
managing his or her stress.*

Show What You Know!

1. Name two body language signals from each category of body language: appeasement, displacement, stress/nervousness, and defensive/offensive.
2. Look at the photo on page 3. What body language do you observe? What do you make of the interaction?
3. What might happen if we punish a dog who growls at us? Why might punishment and other negative reactions not be advisable?
4. Look at the photo on page 6. The dog's tail is up and over its back. Does that mean that the dog must be uncomfortable and/or defensive/aggressive? Why or why not?



ANSWERS:

1. Review page 6 for lists of each.
2. Tail stiff/upright, leaning away from hand, mouth closed, ears pinned back.
3. Review the callout box on page 3. Punishing may cause the dog to give up communicating, may intensify the dog's issues, and does nothing to address the underlying reasons for the dog's reactions.
4. This breed normally carries the tail in this manner; it doesn't necessarily indicate cause for concern. Looking at the rest of the body language (relaxed) supports this assessment.

What Do You See?



What do you see in each of these photos? Notice the individual pieces of body language, the entire dog's body, and possible context.

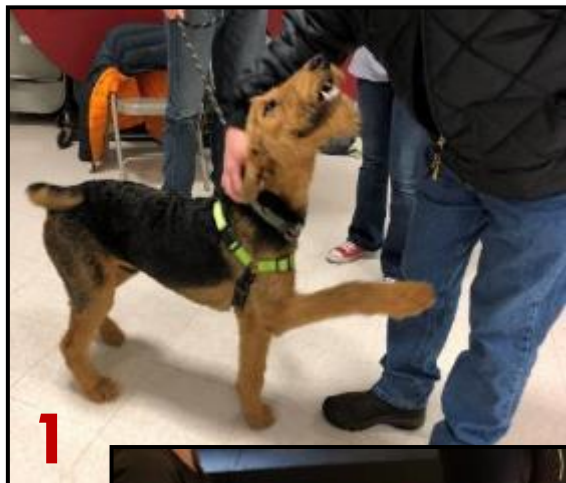
ANSWERS at the bottom of the page, numbered to match the photos.



ANSWERS:

1. The open mouth with tongue out gives the false impression of a happy, relaxed dog. However, a tongue curled upward at the end like this one indicates stress. Also notice the tension in the face and the ears pinned back. Compare the tongue, face, and mouth with the two upper photos on page 9.
2. Observe the furrowed brow, ears slightly down and apart, tense/closed mouth. There is a look of concern. Also note context—the bone between the paws.
3. The dog on the left is tentative and worried—note the paw lift, ears down, the rounded back, the lowered tail, and the tension in the face. The other dog has a much different demeanor—open and inviting—notice the open mouth, tongue out, curved body, and soft facial features.

What Do You See?



Each of these photos displays a paw lift. Should we interpret all of the photos in the same way? Are all of these dogs stressed or uncomfortable?

What do you think each dog is feeling?

Can you name other body language signals that could have different meanings?

ANSWERS at the bottom of the page, numbered to match the photos.



ANSWERS:

No, not all of these dogs are stressed/uncomfortable. If we look at the body language overall and the context, we understand that they are not the same. Dog in photo 1 is lifting paw to solicit attention. Dog in photo 2 is fearful and worried. Dog in photo 3 is anticipating the ball being thrown. Dog in photo 4 is showing deference—due pressure/stress about greeting the stranger in the chair. See page 7 for other dog signals that can carry different meanings.

What Do You See?

*What do you see in each of these photos?
Notice the individual pieces of body language,
the entire dog's body, and possible context.*

*ANSWERS at the bottom of the page,
numbered to match the photos.*



ANSWERS:

1. Note the lowered body posture (especially the head and neck), the paw lift, and closed mouth. Dog is not in a home setting, is on leash, and is being asked to approach a human he doesn't know.
2. Note again the lowered head and body, the tension in the face, alert ears. The stance is such that the dog is leaning back away from the object. However, the dog is showing some engagement—sniffing the object that has spooked him. The context is also important—this is not a home setting, and the dog is being asked to approach an unfamiliar object (a fireman's hat that also carries smell of smoke).

Read More About It

Did you like this handout?

Then you might really like our “WOOF! What is the dog saying?” lecture series—given free or at low-cost in communities around VT.

Schedule and locations:

<https://www.goldstardog.com/woof/>

Recommended sources about body language and dog safety:

- Handelman, Barbara. *Canine Behavior: A Photo Illustrated Handbook*
- Aloff, Brenda. *Canine Body Language: A Photographic Guide*
- Rugaas, Turid. *On Talking Terms With Dogs Calming Signals*
- Doggone Safe: <http://doggonesafe.com/>
- Stop the 77: <http://stopthe77.com/>
- Pet Professional Guild, Canine Advocacy: <https://petprofessionalguild.com/Canine-Advocacy>

Access additional information at the special Woof resource page:



www.goldstardog.com/visit-the-library-l