

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 online forms and testing fee at www.therapydogs.org.

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.
- 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.