



St. John Ambulance

SAVING LIVES
at work, home and play

St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program Evaluation Guidelines

Any dog of sound temperament can become a Therapy Dog. In the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Evaluation, your dog will be subjected to a number of situations, stresses and challenges, as part of a simulated visit to a health care facility. The evaluation will test the dogs temperament, sociability, and ability to follow the handler's lead. Dogs will also be assessed for cleanliness and good grooming.

Any dogs considered for the Therapy Dog Program must be able to successfully demonstrate the following capabilities:

- Accept a friendly stranger
- Sit politely for petting
- React well to other animals and distractions
- Walk on a loose leash
- Sit on command/stay in place
- Walk through a crowd (including wheelchairs)

Some examples of key indicators of a suitable St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog include:

- Responses that do not contain fear or aggression
- Friendliness towards other dogs
- Voice controlled behavior

All dog-handler teams being evaluated are observed from the moment they enter the facility until the end of the evaluation. Dogs that exhibit any signs of aggression (for any reason) will be disqualified and immediately removed from the evaluation. Signs of aggression include but are not limited to the following:

- **Dominance aggression** – An uncommon type of aggression that dogs begin demonstrating at a young age. Often seen in situations where the animal's social position is challenged.
- **Fear aggression** – Often displayed by a dog who is feeling threatened. The dog will likely demonstrate by backing away and will have a lowered body posture prior to demonstrating obvious signs of aggression.
- **Territorial aggression** – In these situations, dogs will show signs of aggression designed to warn or chase away the perceived threat. Dogs demonstrating this aggression protect people or places regardless of whether or not there is an actual threat.
- **Possessive aggression** - Also known as resource guarding. It can be any object (i.e Bowl, bone shoe) including the owner, which the dog highly values and is willing to defend against perceived competitors. Signals that help identify the behavior include grabbing and moving the item, body freezing, hard stares, lip curls and snapping.

There is risk to the safety of our clients and the program to allow a dog to participate in the program if it has shown any sign of aggression.

Any dog that relieves itself in the area or facility where the evaluation is being held will be automatically disqualified.

All dogs will be evaluated on a flat buckle type collar or harness, and only on a 6' lead, either leather or nylon. (A nylon choke on a 'dead' ring is acceptable on heavy coated dogs). Sight-hounds such as Greyhounds, Whippets and Afghans may be tested wearing a Martingale collar as long as it does not have a chain attachment. Dogs can visit on a shorter lead but for evaluation purposes it must be 6'.

A good Therapy Dog will beg for attention, using a quiet mannerly disposition. The dog cannot show rejection, nor be too boisterous or assertive in its behavior. The dog must be on leash and under control at all times.

Please take a moment and review the self-evaluation.

- Does your dog show interest in people without leaning heavily on people, pushing or jumping?
- Can your dog walk on a loose leash and not pull or strain?
- If your dog is excited, can he/she be easily calmed with praise?
- Does your dog exhibit traits of shyness towards humans and objects?
- Is your dog easily spooked by sudden movement/noises?
- Does your dog show aggression towards other dogs?
- Are you open to allowing clients to pet and play with your dog?
- Are you available to commit to a regular visitation schedule at a facility of your choice?

Thank you for your interest.

If you have any questions please contact the Program Coordinator at
therapydog@nl.sja.ca



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