



# Project Canine

THERAPY DOG READINESS INFORMATION

Are You and Your Dog Ready to Become a  
Therapy Dog Team?

What It Takes to Become a Therapy Dog Team with Project Canine

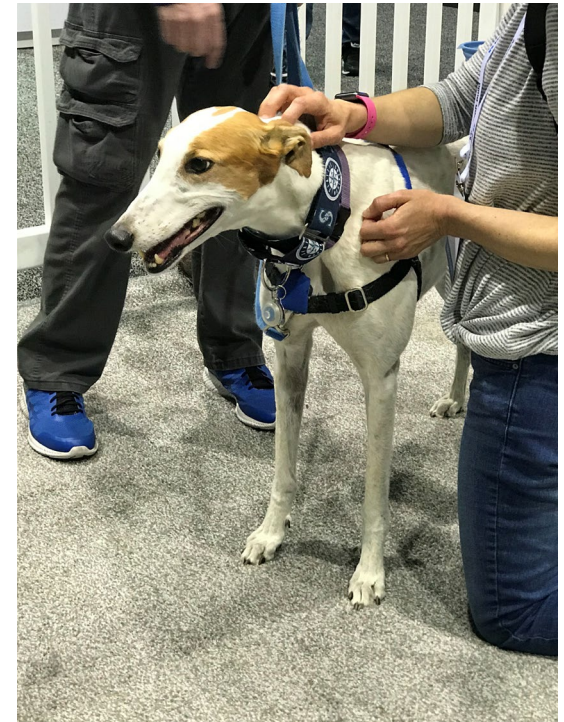
# Welcome to Project Canine

- ▶ The most common question we are asked – “is my dog ready to be a therapy dog?”
- ▶ The purpose of this document is to give you a brief overview of the key components of readiness so you can decide if you and your dog are ready to start the certification process.
- ▶ There are 3 core components that are critical to becoming a therapy dog team with Project Canine:
  - ▶ The relationship between you and your dog
  - ▶ Your dog’s innate temperament
  - ▶ Your dog’s obedience and manners skills



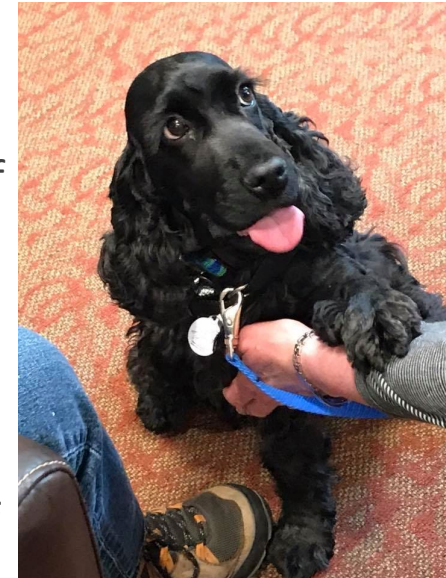
# The Relationship Between You and Your Dog

- ▶ If you certify with your dog you will be certified as *a therapy dog team*
- ▶ It's critical that you have a *positive and supportive* relationship with your dog
  - ▶ We want to see how you interact
  - ▶ That your dog looks to you for support and guidance
  - ▶ That your dog listens and responds to your requests in complex and distracting environments
  - ▶ That you rely on your voice, hand signals, and positive ways of requesting behaviors from your dog
- ▶ We are looking to see that you use positive reinforcement and humane techniques. We do not want to see leashing popping, raised voices, physically pushing on the dog, grabbing skin and fur or other harsher techniques



# Your Dog's Temperament

- ▶ Both animals and humans have characteristics and qualities that are inherent. It is often described as a temperament or disposition. This can't be "trained" to be different. If you think of a human friend that is extremely shy and introverted, no amount of effort is going to turn them into an extrovert who wants to be the center of attention at a party. The same is true with dogs. If you have an extremely shy dog who is nervous around new people and places, trying to train them to become a therapy dog won't work.
- ▶ Your dog needs to be a dog that is positive and confident about unfamiliar places and people.
- ▶ Your dog does not have to be a high energy extrovert, but your dog needs to be open to strangers and new environments without showing fear and concern. Curiosity, observation, needing a bit of time to understand a place are all fine, but deep shyness and reticence are not qualities we will be able to train out of your dog.



# Your Dog's Temperament

- ▶ Your dog must exhibit resilience. What this means is that if they are startled, surprised, caught off-guard, etc. they must be able to recover quickly.
- ▶ It's not an exaggeration to say that anything can happen on a therapy dog visit. Seriously. Anything.
- ▶ It is understandable if your dog responds with surprise, curiosity and even a mild startle to something unexpected, but they must not start lunging, barking, trying to run away, trying to hide etc.
- ▶ There are various exercises to test this with your dog during the exam.
  - ▶ Examples include dropping objects on the floor, using medical equipment such a walker to approach your dog and more.
- ▶ A side note: many dogs are terrified of thunder or fireworks and that is outside the scope of what we are talking about here in terms of fear and startle issues with therapy dogs.



# Obedience and Manners

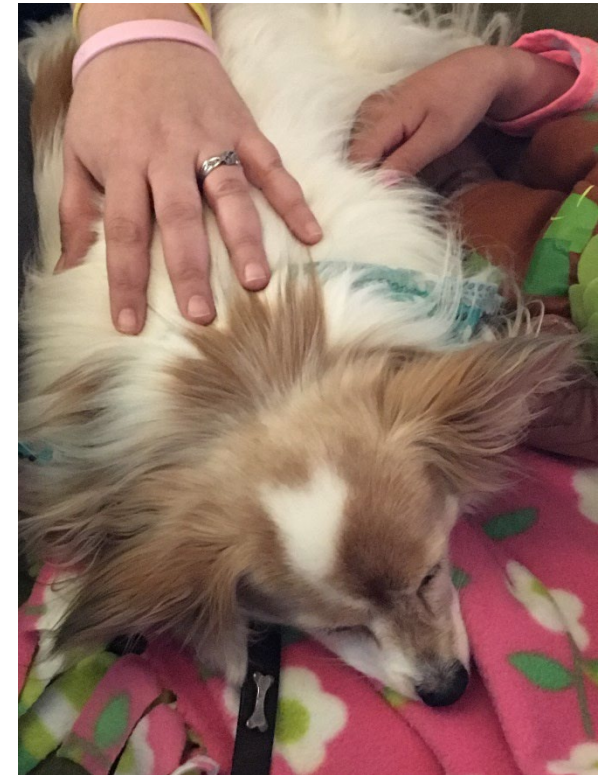
- ▶ **Project Canine's certification program does not provide training for basic obedience skills.** The program assumes a certain level of skill before you begin. If you and your dog need to brush up on basic obedience skills, please plan to do that before you start the certification program. If you need recommendations for a trainer or classes to help you with these types of skills, we can often help with that.
- ▶ One of the sections of the exam focuses on obedience and your dog will need to execute the following at your request without the use of treats as a lure. You may use hand and/or voice signals, but you may not physically "push" or "yank" on your dog.



- ▶ Sit
- ▶ Wait in place for 15 seconds in a sit or a down position while handler is standing at the end of the leash
- ▶ A basic recall or "come"
- ▶ Loose leash/casual walk across the testing room
- ▶ Must have at least an emerging ability to "down" – meaning your dog must have an understanding of the behavior and at least try to respond/execute the behavior
- ▶ Must be able to walk past another handler and dog on a leash in a calm manner meaning no aggression, growling, and not lunging or overly excited
- ▶ Must be able to respond to a "leave it!" request when passing by a toy or interesting object

# Obedience and Manners

- ▶ There is a spectrum of energy levels in dogs just like in people. We have therapy dogs that are very low key and low affect and dogs that are more energetic and expressive.
- ▶ The key is that your dog must have good manners regardless of their energy level. What this means is:
  - ▶ Greet people politely – no jumping up, pawing/clawing at a new person, excessive licking, shoving their head into someone's lap with force, etc.
  - ▶ No excessive vocalizing – we understand that dogs make sounds, however, as you can imagine, some types of vocalizing would be highly disruptive in a therapy dog environment:
    - ▶ Alert barking
    - ▶ Crying and whining that doesn't settle or stop
    - ▶ Any warning sounds like growling



# Obedience and Manners

- ▶ It is important that your dog does not guard resources – either you, or high value items like a treat or toy. Your dog must not bark, lunge or growl if another person touches you and they must release treats, toys or food if asked without growling, snapping or snarling. Testing for this is part of our exam process.
- ▶ It is also important that your dog can maintain their composure around other dogs. They don't need to be highly social and love other dogs, but they must not be highly reactive. Sometimes people overlook this piece because they assume they will be visiting on their own with their dog. To some extent, this is true, but your dogs' ability to maintain composure on a variety of levels is critical to showing that it has the stability of temperament and also the skills needed to become a therapy dog.
  - ▶ In addition, some facilities have staff dogs or allow pet dogs inside and your dog must remain calm in those instances.
- ▶ If your dog is leash reactive or has issues with other dogs, please be sure to contact us so we can determine if your dog will be able to successfully complete our program.



# Your Dog's Health

- ▶ Please consider the status of your dog's health before enrolling in the certification program.
- ▶ There are many types of health issues that don't preclude a dog from becoming a therapy dog. The keys are:
  - ▶ The condition, issue, or disease has been reviewed by a vet and there is a diagnosis and a plan for resolving or managing the situation.
  - ▶ Your dog must be able to be pain free during therapy dog visits.
- ▶ If your dog has just been diagnosed with cancer, please don't enroll in the program. Cancer is a difficult condition for humans and dogs and it's not appropriate to try to take on the certification process and visiting if your dog is new to being a therapy dog. If the cancer is treatable you can enroll in the program when the condition is resolved.
- ▶ If you have any questions about a health issue that your dog has please email us.



# A Word About Dogs Under 3 Years of Age

- ▶ Dogs from 9 months to 2 years of age (and sometimes longer) are in a “teenager” phase. While wonderful they can be overly exuberant and easily distracted by busy environments. If your dog is a teenager, please consider their energy level and ability to respond to your obedience requests, particularly in distracting situations, before deciding to proceed. Since COVID, we are seeing developmental delays in dogs and many young dogs are maturing more slowly. Dogs 3 years of age and under are having challenges being ready to start the program.
- ▶ Most young dogs want to play and be physical, more than they want to sit still and visit. They are also more likely to be startled or unnerved by things on a visit than an older more mature dog. All of these aspects make it difficult for young dogs to successfully certify. It doesn't no young dogs are ever ready, but most aren't.
- ▶ Please keep in mind the average age of our therapy dogs is 4-7 years old. Your young dog has time to mature and grow into this activity.

# Thank You For Your Interest in Project Canine

- ▶ If you are ready to proceed, please visit our website [www.projectcanine.org](http://www.projectcanine.org) and register for class.
- ▶ If you don't think you and your dog are ready yet, don't be discouraged. We have had many prospective teams who needed to do some skill-building and after working with their dogs successfully became certified.
- ▶ If you would like to have an initial assessment of your dog to determine if he/she is ready, we do 30-minute preassessment appointments. Please contact us at [info@projectcanine.org](mailto:info@projectcanine.org) to schedule one.
- ▶ If you don't believe your dog is temperamentally appropriate for therapy dog visits, we hope you will find another activity to enjoy with your canine companion. There are lots of options out there!
- ▶ If you still have questions, please contact us via email – [info@projectcanine.org](mailto:info@projectcanine.org)