
DOES YOUR DOG HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A THERAPY DOG?

GETTING STARTED IN ANIMAL-ASSISTED
THERAPY

By Mary Burch, PhD

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INTRODUCTION

It's one of the most frequent calls to the AKC Canine Good Citizen department:

*“My dog is great with people!
I want her to be a therapy dog.
Where do I start?”*



chapter one

**WOULD YOUR DOG
MAKE A GOOD
THERAPY DOG?**

would your dog make a **GOOD THERAPY DOG?**

Animal-assisted therapy is one of the most rapidly growing activities for dogs and their owners.

You've heard about the wonderful work that therapy dogs do.

You love your dog, think she is wonderful, and you'd like her to become a therapy dog.

First, you need to think about the characteristics of a good therapy dog.

Let's start with what a therapy dog is.



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would your dog make a **GOOD THERAPY DOG?**

THERAPY DOGS ARE:

- Healthy, with no diseases or illnesses
- Friendly
- They like to interact with other people
- They are well-behaved in the presence of other dogs
- They are not frightened by noises (such as floor-buffing machines), slick floors (such as those in the halls of a hospital) or by people who have unusual behaviors (such as waving their arms or speaking loudly).
- Well-trained
- Registered with reputable therapy dog organizations that assess the dogs on therapy-specific skills (such as “Leave it” when pills are on the floor, or “Go say hello”).

would your dog make a **GOOD THERAPY DOG?**

THERAPY DOGS VS. SERVICE DOGS

Therapy dogs volunteer with their owner-handlers to help people in settings such as schools, hospitals, and nursing homes. They do not have the same special access as service dogs. This means they can't go on planes, restaurants, and other places just because they are therapy dogs.

Service dogs help individuals with a disability. They are permitted in public places where dogs are usually restricted.



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chapter two

**THREE STEPS TO
MAKING YOUR DOG
A THERAPY DOG**

three steps to making your dog **A THERAPY DOG**

1. BASIC TRAINING: THE AKC'S CANINE GOOD CITIZEN TEST

All therapy dogs must be under control and have basic training. Some therapy groups require that the dog pass the Canine Good Citizen test before taking the group's therapy test. CGC is a great starting point for all potential therapy dogs because your dog will learn basic good manners in CGC including come, sit, stay, down, and how to respond appropriately around other dogs.

*To learn about CGC and a list of the
10 items on the test, see:*

*[http://www.akc.org/events/cgc/
cgc_bystate.cfm](http://www.akc.org/events/cgc/cgc_bystate.cfm)*

three steps to making your dog **A THERAPY DOG**

2. DO YOUR HOMEWORK ABOUT THERAPY DOG ORGANIZATIONS

When you join a local therapy-dog group, you'll meet experienced therapy dog handlers who can teach you the skills that you need when volunteering in therapy settings. Therapy organizations also provide members with the necessary liability insurance for when they are volunteering.

*For a CGC trainer/evaluator
in your area, see:*

*[http://www.akc.org/events/cgc/
cgc_bystate.cfm](http://www.akc.org/events/cgc/cgc_bystate.cfm)*

*To see a list of therapy dog organizations and their
requirements, see:*

www.akc.org/akctherapydog

three steps to making your dog **A THERAPY DOG**

3. REGISTER WITH A THERAPY ORGANIZATION

Now that you have selected a therapy dog organization, you're ready to get the application (from their web page) and complete the application requirements.

*After you've made 50 visits,
you can apply for the AKC Therapy Dog title,
the ThD see:*

www.akc.org/akctherapydog

three steps to making your dog **A THERAPY DOG**

THERE ARE ALSO SOME OTHER THINGS YOU CAN DO:

Contact a local facility. If you're thinking about volunteering at a particular facility in your town, call and ask to speak to the volunteer coordinator to find out if there is a therapy dog program. You may also learn if the therapy dog group at the facility registers all of its therapy dogs through one organization. You can save yourself time if you know this early on. You could also ask if you can visit and watch the therapy dogs before your dog is registered with a group. Make the visit without your dog.

Contact an AKC club. If you don't know of a facility in your town, you can contact your local AKC club and ask if any of their members are doing therapy dog work. Local dog trainers are usually aware of the local therapy dog groups and activities.

Find an AKC club near you at

<http://www.akc.org/clubs/about.cfm>



chapter three
**THERAPY DOGS:
A RICH HISTORY**

therapy dogs: **A RICH HISTORY**

- A therapy animal program was started for people with disabilities in Gheel, Belgium, in the ninth century.
- In 1919, therapy animals helped patients at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C.
- In the 1950s, at Yeshiva University, Dr. Boris Levinson's landmark work with his Sheltie, "Jingles," showed that children did better in psychotherapy when the dog was present.
- By the 1970s and '80s, several national organizations began to register therapy dogs and handlers.
- Currently, thousands of therapy dogs and their handlers volunteer to help others.



The most important part of the therapy dog equation is the client who will be receiving services. If you mainly want to spend some time with your dog and your primary focus isn't the senior citizen who is profoundly lonely, or the child who is struggling to read, or the teenager who has endured a lifetime of abuse, you should choose another activity. There are many engaging and fun things you can do with your dog. Therapy work is for those who sincerely want to help others.

We hope that you and your dog enjoy volunteering in an animal-assisted therapy setting to improve the lives of others.

THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

The AKC is a not-for-profit organization and the largest purebred dog registry in the world. We are the sports-governing body for over 22,000 dog events a year, including conformation (dog shows) and exciting sports like agility, obedience, rally, tracking, lure coursing, earthdog, herding trials, among others.

But the AKC is so much more. Here are just some of the ways we support and enrich the lives of dogs—purebreds and mixed-breeds alike—and their families.

[AKC Humane Fund](#), supports breed rescue activities, assists shelters that permit domestic-abuse victims to bring their pets, and educates dog lovers about responsible dog ownership.

[Canine Good Citizen®](#) program : A 10-step test that certifies dogs who have good manners at home and in their community. Over 600,000 dogs across the United States have become Canine Good Citizens , and 42 states have passed resolutions recognizing the program's merit and importance.

[AKC Reunite](#) has brought more than 400,000 lost pets back together with their owners.

The [AKC Canine Health Foundation](#), funds research projects and clinical studies. Since 1995 the AKC has donated over \$24 million to the CHF. (The AKC is the only registry that incorporates health-screening results into its permanent dog records.)

[AKC](#) conducts thousands of kennel inspections annually to monitor care and conditions at kennels across the country and ensure the integrity of the AKC registry.

We offer the largest, most comprehensive set of DNA programs for parentage verification and genetic identity to ensure reliable registration records.

AKC supports one of the world's largest collections of dog-related fine art and artifacts at the [AKC Museum of the Dog](#).

We have the world's largest [dog library](#) at AKC headquarters in New York, both of which are open to the public.