

Therapy Dog Class

The Clinton County Canine Club's therapy dog class prepares dog/handler teams for therapy dog evaluation. A potential therapy dog must be calm, patient and accepting of strangers and other dogs with no signs of fear or aggression.

A flat buckle or snap-in collar (non-training) or harness (non-training) and a 6-foot leash will be used for the class unless otherwise noted. Dogs must be at least one year old to participate in most therapy dog evaluations done in this area.

Skills to be Covered and Mastered:

1. Check in: The teams are checked in and the dogs' collar, ears, paws, and tail are checked. Each foot is picked up and the instructor/assistant will touch the dog's tail.
2. The dog/handler team will walk in a crowd of people. The team will meet various people and some will try visiting with the dog. The dog should remain at the handler's side and may visit with members of the crowd without pulling or jumping.
3. The dog/handler teams will line up 8 feet apart with the dogs in a heel position (dog on left side). The instructor/assistant will ask the handler to place the dog in a sit/stay position. The handlers will move to the end of the leash and wait for two minutes until the instructor/assistant tells them to return to their dogs.
4. This is the same as #3 except that the dogs must be in a down/stay.
5. While the handlers are seated, dogs will be attached to 20-foot leashes by the instructor/assistant. One dog/handler team will proceed to a specific area. The handler will "sit" or "down" the dog and tell the dog to stay. The handler walks to the end of the leash, turns around and upon command, recalls the dog.
6. The dog must visit a patient. The patient will be in either a wheelchair, using a walker or crutches. The dog may not show any fear of the equipment.
7. The dog/handler team meets a person with a walker. While the dog is visiting the person, the person will offer the dog a treat. Upon the handler's command the dog must ignore the treat. The handler should explain why the dog cannot eat the treat.
8. After visiting the person in a walker the dog/handler team moves on in a straight line. A treat will be in the path of the dog. The dog must leave the treat.
9. The dog/handler team must walk past a demo dog/handler team. The demo dog/handler team will stop and ask the testing team a question. The two teams part after a brief conversation and shaking hands.
10. The dog/handler team must go through a door. The dog must be put in a sit, down, or stand and wait for a person to go through the door before the dog/handler team.

11. The instructor/assistant will present various noise distractions: opening a garbage bag, dropping stainless steel bowls, and/or snapping a clipboard. Dogs may react but must recover in a reasonable amount of time.
12. The instructor/handler will walk past dogs in an unsteady manner. Dogs may react but must recover in a reasonable amount of time.

For more information and the specifics for certification for any one therapy dog organization, check the website of the organization.