



## Loving Animals Providing Smiles

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*Bringing acceptance, laughter and love into the lives of others.*

### Is Animal-Assisted Therapy Right for My Pet?

#### **Necessary components of a quality therapy team include:**

- Solid temperament of the animal;
- Combined abilities of the animal and handler working as a team;
- Enjoyment of interacting with people for extended periods of time; and
- Willingness of the handler to learn new skills with their pet for use in therapy work.

#### **Like many organized activities for dogs, volunteering as an animal-assisted therapy team takes effort and commitment.**

However, animal-assisted therapy is not just another dog sport or performance event. You are making a commitment to facilities and clients that you and your pet will spend time to help them in a real, personal way. Animal-assisted therapy is about service to others, and it is not something to be approached casually.

We have been fortunate to meet many people with good intentions, who want to make a positive contribution to their community with their pets by their side. However well-intentioned these individuals may be, many are unable to recognize that their pets do not share the same interests.

Animals described as “shy” or “reserved” are often fearful. While they love going places with their owner(s), these pets may not be happy meeting and interacting with strangers outside their homes. Pets noted as “energetic,” “rambunctious,” or “full of life” are often young and easily excitable. These pets should be given the opportunity to enjoy their youth. Once mature, they may find animal-assisted therapy work a perfect fit.

“Touch-sensitive” or “physically-restricted” pets should be given special consideration. Owners should think twice about the added stress these animals will take on when performing animal-assisted therapy and how that may impact their quality of life. While you may be confident that animal-assisted therapy is right for you, your pet can only “vote” with his behavior. He will show you whether he truly enjoys the work therapy animals are asked to perform. Be attentive to what your pet is telling you about the stresses and realities of animal-assisted therapy sessions. If you know qualified animal behavior professionals or experienced animal-assisted therapy handlers, ask their advice. Listen and learn from their experiences.

Be very honest with yourself about your pet’s suitability for therapy work. We want you to be successful, but more importantly, we want teams where both the handler and pet enjoy the work and the client receives quality attention and support.

We strongly encourage those who want to help others by becoming a therapy team to take the time and learn if it is the right fit for both you AND your pet.