



Loving Animals Providing Smiles

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

Comparisons and Definitions for Therapy Dogs - Facility Dogs - Visiting/Comfort Dogs

	Therapy Dog	Facility Dog	Visiting / Comfort Dog
Primary role is to help other people.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is allowed in businesses where pets are not allowed.	No	No	No
Is only allowed in facilities / locations where it is invited.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Has solid obedience and is tested on consistency of skills.	Yes	Yes	Varies
Has specialized training and testing to ensure it has good public access skills and is safe in public.	Yes	Often	Usually not
Has passed behavioral assessments for different client populations and therapy settings.	Yes	Often	Usually not
Monitored / re-evaluated every 2-3 years to ensure the pet's health and training remain intact.	Yes	Often	Usually not
Has advanced skills to assist in the therapy of a person such as physical therapy, working with autistic children, etc.	Yes	Often	Usually not
Is registered / certified with an organization and has liability insurance.	Yes	Often	Often

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(continued)

The term **“Therapy Dog”** and **“Therapy Team”** should be used by organizations with a thorough training and screening program. Such groups provide hands-on training and comprehensive testing of the person and pet working as a team, plus consistent and rigorous pet screening (including behavioral assessment). Therapy Dogs / Teams work as volunteers and are evaluated every 2-3 years to ensure the continued safety of the public, pet and the handler.

Genuine therapy dogs are friendly, patient and gentle with strangers. Their primary job is to enjoy physical contact with unfamiliar people. Each dog must demonstrate not only solid basic obedience but also advanced skills directed toward helping clients. Such dogs have the ability to work with a variety of client populations, in different settings, in the presence of distractions, and without food / toy rewards.

A **“Facility Dog”** (also called “Therapeutic Facility Dog”) refers to a canine who is regularly present in a residential, clinical or educational setting. The animal might live with a handler who is an employee of the facility and comes to work with that individual, or the dog may live at the facility full time under the care of staff.

Such canines are companion dogs and many have similar skills as certified / registered Therapy Dogs (as described in this document). Facility dogs should be specially trained for the locations and populations they serve, including advanced skills, and meet standards like those of [Pet Partners®](#). These dogs work in the same location and do not travel to multiple locations and work with a variety of clients like Therapy Dogs.

Organizations with **“Comfort Dogs”**, **“Visiting Dogs”**, **“Visiting Pets”** and **“Visiting Teams”** (sometimes referred to “Social Therapy Dogs”) focus on providing pets that are friendly with strangers outside their own homes. Volunteers and their pets often visit a variety of locations and meet a variety of clients, much as Therapy Dogs.

Such organizations commonly use the AKC’s Canine Good Citizen™ evaluation to assess a dog’s ability to work in public settings, but training varies widely. Rarely do these groups proof a dog’s obedience skills, provide comprehensive screening of pets or people, or re-evaluate a team’s abilities every few years. Training can be limited to a classroom setting with the animal’s handler only.