

Therapy Dogs of Vermont (TDV) Training and Team Evaluation Guidelines

TDV recommends and supports positive-based training approaches and the humane training of dogs.

The dog/handler relationship is key to TDV's activities. We place dogs in close proximity to people, often with compromised health. The settings and policies of the organizations we serve may differ, but in every situation the handler's ability to guide, calm, and control their dog is of paramount importance. Our training and team evaluation policies are designed to ensure the safety of the animals, handlers, and patients and to enhance the therapeutic success of TDV visits.

Our teams come to us with established training protocols and philosophies—each with their own communication style and working relationship. TDV expects that teams have a solid foundation in obedience and a positive working relationship involving training, socialization, trust, and respect. From this foundation, TDV works with each team to ensure a safe and positive visitation experience.

Our work is carried out exclusively by volunteers who come to us with well-established relationships with their animals. There are many different training methods and tools, and the choice of which to use is one only the handler can make. Before being approved to work with TDV, each dog/handler team must be evaluated to ensure humane and effective handling.

For safety reasons, we do not permit the use of spraying collars (such as citronella) or electric collars, spray bottles or spraying devices of any kind, or clickers and other noise-making devices.

Team Evaluations

Each TDV team is carefully evaluated. Teams coming for testing and evaluating must be in complete control and meet all standards of behavior—regardless of training method.

When we are evaluating teamwork and training, we are seeking a balance in approach and attitude. We look for:

- Mutual respect—a dog and handler that understand each other
- Handlers who can communicate what is expected to their dog
- Handlers who are aware of the dog's reactions and needs
- Handlers who will support the dog, or remove it from a difficult situation—for instance if the dog becomes nervous or overwhelmed by a large crowd of children
- Appropriate guidance by the handler, including sensitivity and moderation in training