



Blue Ribbon Therapy Dogs

Thank you for your interest in becoming a member of Blue Ribbon Therapy Dogs (BRTD). Before becoming a registered therapy dog team, you and your dog need to be evaluated by a BRTD approved evaluator. Below is an explanation what is expected from you and your dog for eligibility to join the BRTD team.

Evaluation Requirements

Even though training and educating a dog is an ongoing process, BRTD expects teams to have a solid foundation in obedience and a positive working relationship. We expect a dog and handler have an established partnership involving training, socialization, trust, and respect. When we are evaluating this teamwork and training, we are looking for a balance in approach and attitude of working together. For example, a handler who continuously needs treats to get the dog's cooperation may signal a problem in the relationship. Likewise, a handler who administers constant or unfair corrections may also signal a relationship/training level not ready for therapy dog work.

Among other things, we consider:

- Dogs must be under control when entering the testing facility.
- Both handler and dog must be well groomed and dressed appropriately as if they were on an actual volunteer visit. This demonstrates the professionalism of the team. They must also come prepared and on-time for the test.
- Mutual respect—a dog and handler that for the most part understand each other and a handler who understands the dog and can communicate what is expected to the dog?
- Handler aware of the dog's reactions and needs—for example, if dog is nervous or overwhelmed by a large group of people, how does the handler support the dog?
- Is there too much or too little guidance. Too many treats? Too many corrections? Too little praise?
- Being able to control the dog under normal as well as unexpected circumstances is critical. Teams will often encounter unexpected situations/noises/human behaviors.
- It is expected that a handler is able to respond to the dog for poor behavior and keep the dog under control at all times. If used, corrections should be fair, gentle and constructive. Handler and dog should work as a team.
- Since teams often work together, it is important that all therapy dogs who are working together are focused on their therapy task, and not interested in inappropriate interactions with fellow therapy dogs.
- Can the dog greet other dogs briefly on leash, and also work in close proximity to each other without either excitement or aggression/fear? Does the handler anticipate his/her dog's response to other dogs and respond proactively? *This is not an automatic failure but may be cause for restricted visitation privileges.*
- The test also looks at whether the dog has suitable social skills and temperament for interacting with people. Testers examine body language, manners, social ability, and temperament. It is important that dogs are engaged and social during interactions with the people they visit.
- Throughout the evaluation, the handler will also be assessed for the social skills necessary for different therapy situations, i.e. interacting respectfully and appropriately with seniors, children and disabled persons.

Below are most of the actual tests the team will have to pass.

1. **Accepting a Friendly Stranger:** This test demonstrates that the dog will allow a stranger to approach it and speak to the handler in a natural, everyday situation. The Evaluator and handler shake hands and exchange pleasantries. The dog must show no sign of resentment or shyness, and must not break position or try to go to the Evaluator.
2. **Sitting Politely for Petting:** This test demonstrates that the dog will allow a friendly stranger to and begins to pet the dog on the head and body only. The dog may stand in place to accept petting. The dog must not show resentment or aggression
3. **Appearance and Grooming:** This practical test demonstrates that the dog will welcome being groomed and examined and will permit a stranger, such as a veterinarian, groomer, or friend of the owner, to do so. It also demonstrates the owner's care, concern and sense of responsibility. The Evaluator inspects the dog, then combs or brushes the dog, and lightly examines the ears and each front foot.(Nails must be clipped short and be rounded smooth to avoid scratching fragile skin in those visited by OTD Therapy Dogs.)
4. **Out for a Walk (walking on a loose leash):** This test demonstrates that the handler is in control of the dog. The dog can be on either side of the handler, whichever the handler prefers. There must be a left turn, a right turn and an about turn, with at least one stop in between and another at the end. The dog need not be perfectly aligned with the handler and need not sit when the handler stops.
5. **Walking Through a Crowd:** This test demonstrates that the dog can move about politely in pedestrian traffic and is under control in public places. The dog and handler walk around and pass close to several people (at least three). The dog may show some interest in the strangers, without appearing over---exuberant, shy or resentful. The handler may talk to the dog and encourage or praise the dog throughout the test. The dog should not be straining at the leash.
6. **Sit/Down on Command/Staying in Place:** This test demonstrates that the dog has training, will respond to the handler's commands to sit and down, and will remain in the place commanded by the handler (sit or down position, whichever the handler prefers). The handler may take a reasonable amount of time and use more than one command to make the dog sit and then down. When instructed by the Evaluator, the handler tells the dog to stay and walks forward the length of a 20 foot line. The dog must remain in place, but may change position.
7. **Come When Called:** This test demonstrates that the dog will come when called by the handler. The handler will walk 10 feet from the dog, turn to face the dog, and call the dog. The handler may use encouragement to get the dog to come. Handlers may choose to tell the dog to "stay" or "wait" or they may simply walk away, giving no instructions to the dog as the Evaluator provides mild distraction (e.g., petting).
8. **Reaction to Another Dog:** This test demonstrated that the dog can behave politely around other dogs. Two handlers and their dogs approach each other from a distance of about 10 yards, stop, shake hands and exchange pleasantries, and continue on for about 5 yards. The dogs should show no more than a casual interest in each other.
9. **Reactions to Distractions:** This test demonstrates that the dog is confident at all times when faced with common distracting situations, such as the dropping of a large book or a jogger running in front of the dog. The dog may express a natural interest and curiosity and/or appear slightly startled, but should not panic, try to run away, show aggressiveness, or bark.
10. **Reaction to Medical Equipment:** The dog should be tested around medical equipment (such as a wheelchair, crutches, cane, walker, or other devices which would ordinarily be found in a facility) to judge the dog's reactions. At the discretion of the Evaluator, this test may be included in any of the following portions of the test.

11. **Leave It:** The handler with the dog on a loose leash walks past food on the ground (placed with a distance of three feet) and, upon command, the dog should ignore the food.
12. **Acclimation to Infirmities:** This test demonstrates the dog's confidence when exposed to people walking with an uneven gait, shuffling, breathing heavily, coughing, wheezing or other distractions that may be encountered in a facility.
13. **Supervised Separation:** This test demonstrates that a dog can be left with a trusted person, if necessary, and will maintain its training and good manners. Evaluators would say something like, "Would you like me to watch your dog?" and then take hold of the dog's leash. The owner will go out of sight for three minutes. The dog does not have to stay in position but should not continually bark, whine, or pace unnecessarily, or show anything stronger than mild agitation or nervousness.

Note: Dogs must be tested on a martingale or buckle collar.