

Touch Our Pets - Therapy Dogs

.....spread smiles for miles.....

PO Box 10047, The Falls,

Benoni, 1522

Tel/Fax 011 425 4075

Cell- 083 7155 344

Email – topdogs@iafrica.com

www.therapytopdogs.co.za



Evaluation Programme

Handlers should use praise and encouragement throughout the tests.

Food rewards are allowed after an exercise is completed, but luring with food is not allowed. Squeaky and other toys are not allowed, but will be part of one of the assessment tests.

Test 1: Accepting a friendly stranger –

This test demonstrates that the dog will allow a friendly stranger to approach it and speak to the handler in a natural, everyday situation. The evaluator walks up to the dog and handler and greets the handler in a friendly manner, ignoring the dog. The evaluator and handler shake hands, hug and exchange pleasantries. The dog must show no sign of resentment, shyness or avoidance.

Following on is Test 2: Politely accepting petting

This test demonstrates that the dog will allow a friendly stranger to touch it while it is out with its handler. With the dog sitting at the handler's side, to begin the exercise, the evaluator pets the dog on the head and body. The handler may talk to his or her dog throughout the exercise. The dog may stand in place as it is petted. The dog must not show resentment, shyness, or avoidance.

Test 3: Appearance and grooming

This practical test demonstrates that the dog will welcome being groomed and examined and will permit someone, such as a veterinarian, groomer, client 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 to determine if it is clean and groomed. The dog must appear to be in healthy condition (i.e. clean, healthy and alert). The handler should supply the comb or brush commonly used on the dog. The evaluator then softly combs or brushes the dog, and in a natural manner, lightly examines the ears and gently picks up each front foot. It is not necessary for the dog to hold a specific position during the examination, and the handler may talk to the dog, praise it and give encouragement throughout.

Test 4: Leash manners

This test demonstrates that the handler is in control of the dog. The dog may be on either side of the handler. The dog's position should leave no doubt that the dog is attentive to the handler and is responding to the handler's movements and changes of direction. The dog need not be perfectly aligned with the handler and need not sit when the handler stops. The evaluator will direct the handler/dog team by issuing instructions or commands. [There will be a right turn, left turn, and an about turn with at least one stop in between and another at the end.] The handler may talk to the dog along the way, praise the dog, or give commands in a normal tone of voice. The handler may sit the dog at the halts if desired, but the dog must sit at the end of the exercise.

The handler will pass through a gate with the dog showing good manners, not forging or dragging the owner along.

Test 5: 'Lets go' Play and calm

This is to evaluate the dogs temperament viz. excitable behaviour and it's ability to be brought under control. The handler may play (with or without a toy) for at least one minutes and thereafter get the dog back under control and presenting calm behaviour.

Test 6: Walking through a crowd + reaction to other dogs

All dogs with handlers, plus spare handlers, walk in an around together. 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 but should continue to walk with the handler, without evidence of over-exuberance, shyness or resentment. The handler may talk to the dog and encourage or praise the dog throughout the test. The dog should not jump on people in the crowd [This is a test of pro-active handling].

Test 7: Sit and down on command, staying in place then coming when called

This test demonstrates that the dog has had some basic 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 dog must do sit AND down on command, then the owner chooses the position for leaving the dog in the stay. The handler may take a reasonable amount of time and use more than one command to get the dog to sit and then down. The evaluator must determine if the dog has responded to the handler's commands. The handler may not force the dog into position but may gently touch the dog to offer gentle guidance.

When instructed by the evaluator, the handler tells the dog to stay and walks forward, turns and returns to the dog at a natural pace. The dog must remain in the place in which it was left (it may change position) until the evaluator instructs the handler to release the dog. The dog may be released from the front the side or rear. The dog does not need a "formal" obedience show "stay" – however we need to know that the dog understands the stay command. The dog can be gently 'helped' to stay.

The handler leaves the dog again but this time coming when called The handler will walk 10 feet from the dog, turn to face the dog, and call the dog. The handler may use encouragement [not food] to get the dog to come. Handlers may choose to tell dogs to "stay" or "wait" or they may simply walk away, giving no instructions to the dog. If the dog has not learnt a formal "stay" or "wait" a helper or the evaluator may hold the dog and then release it when it is called to the owner.

Test 8: Reaction to distractions

This test demonstrates that the dog is confident at all times when faced with common distracting situations. The evaluator will select and present many distractions. The dog may express natural interest and curiosity and/or may appear slightly startled but should not panic, try to run away, show aggressiveness, or bark. The handler may talk to the dog and encourage or praise it throughout the exercise.

[Distraction examples – Zimmer, crutches, walking stick, umbrella, balls, squeaky toys, children running shouting, pushing buggy etc. Sounds at a distance - pop balloon, bang metal bowls]

Test 9: Reaction to children

Dog sits with handler while a group of children approach and pet the dog. Many dogs have not had the opportunity to interact with children and could be nervous around them.

Test 10: Good manners being given treats

Evaluator sitting down -

- Give treat – this test if the dog takes gently?
- Offer treat and pull away at last minute – this tests if the dog will snap or bite?
- Give two dogs a treat when at each side of evaluator – This tests if dog shows food aggression
- ‘Leave it’ – can the dog leave a treat when told. A dog could try to eat something that is harmful to him when on a visit. [not a failing point, but something the dog needs to learn for it’s own safety]

Test 11 : Supervised separation – A test to see how stable or confident the dog is without the “back-up” of its handler.

This test demonstrates that a dog can be left with a trusted person, if necessary, and will maintain training and good manners. Evaluators are encouraged to 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. Evaluators may talk to the dog but should not engage in excessive talking, petting, or management attempts [A dog would fail if separation would cause it psychological harm, or if it became aggressive]

Equipment:

All tests must be performed on leash. Dogs should wear well-fitting buckle or slip collars made of leather or fabric. Special training collars such as choke chains, spike, pinch or spray collars, head halters, etc. are not permitted in the TOP Dogs evaluation

The owner/handler should bring the **dog's brush** or comb to the test, and **an up-to-date Vaccination certificate**.

Failures –

Any dog that growls, snaps, bites, attacks, or attempts to attack a person or another dog is not a good Therapy Dog and must be dismissed from the test, but, may be considered for re-evaluation after training/rehabilitation.

We hope you enjoy your evaluation day, and are successful in completing the test.

There will be water for the dogs, but don't forget your own refreshments, especially in hot weather.

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