

Companion Paws Testing Guidelines for Handlers

Everyone at Companion Paws Canada is a dog lover. As such, we only qualify Assisted and Visiting Therapy Dogs who enjoy interacting with strangers. This is to ensure that we protect dogs who may not enjoy interacting with strangers from being over-stressed or forced into such activities.

To qualify as a Therapy dog, the dog must:

- Have no aggression towards people or other dogs.
- Be friendly, gentle and loving.
- Have basic therapy obedience and manners training completed.
- Be fully house trained prior to the temperament assessment and final evaluation.

The dog must be on a fixed-length (no more than six feet) leather, nylon, or fabric leash. Retractable leashes are not allowed. The dog will wear a leather, nylon, or fabric collar with a metal buckle or plastic quick-snap closure or harness. Halters, slip collars, metal collars, choke chains and special training collars (e.g. "pinch", "spike", prong, electric, or spray collars) are not allowed during the evaluation.

The Handler may use verbal and/or hand signals to communicate with the dog. The Handler may not physically force the dog to perform an action during the evaluation

No dog treats, toys or food in the evaluation room.

The Handler must bring the dog's own comb for the grooming exercise.

During testing, there will be people and dogs standing inside the testing area. Children may be included in one or more of the tests.

Visiting or Assisted teams will not pass if the dog or Handler display any sign of aggression or extreme stress.

After the evaluation, the Adjudicator will be happy to discuss the results with you and answer any questions.

Remember, you are the dog's advocate. If at any point during the evaluation, you feel that the exercise is too stressful for the dog, you should let the Adjudicator know. You may withdraw from the evaluation at any time.

The Dog should be comfortable with:

- Greeting the Infirm:
The dog will greet a stranger in a wheelchair etc. It should not be shy of or scared of the interaction or petting.
- All-Over Body Touch:
The dog will be touched all over its body. Small dogs sit on the lap of each evaluation assistant.
- Restraining Interactions:
Includes tight hugging, gentle ear-pulling, gentle tail-pulling, and gentle leg-pulling
- Clumsy petting:

Includes on the head as well as the body. The evaluation with children also includes light finger poking.

- Awkward movements:
Includes awkward arm-swinging and walking.
- Bumping from behind:
The dog will be bumped gently from behind while with its handler.
- Yelling and other loud noises:
Includes loud talking between 2 evaluation assistants and dropping of an object in front of the dog to create a loud noise.
- Crowded Petting:
The dog will be petted simultaneously by multiple evaluation assistants.

Often, handlers find that the dogs can pass all the required tests at home but fail to perform at the evaluation facility. The presence of new smells, healthcare equipment, strangers, and other dogs can be distracting. To qualify as a Companion Paws Canada Therapy dog, the dog must pass all the required tests while being evaluated by a CPC evaluator with others in a new environment.

Evaluation Tests:

1. Appearance and Grooming
2. Obeying Commands: Stay / Come / Sit / Down
3. Figure 8 Loose Leash Control
4. Reaction to Distraction (clipboard)
5. Reaction To Crutches
6. Reaction to Wheelchair
7. Accepting a Friendly Stranger
8. Accepting an Annoying Stranger
9. Leave It (popcorn)
10. Leave It (people food)
11. Say Hello
12. No Mark Manners
13. Reactions to Distraction (person)
14. Walking Through a Crowd
15. Out for a Walk (without handler)
16. Reaction to Another Dog
17. Supervised Separation

Handler and Dog must arrive at least 30 minutes before the evaluation starts. At any time, any Companion Paws Adjudicator, Assistant or Volunteer may be observing or interacting with the dog. If the dog displays any aggression or relieves itself inside the evaluation facility, the team will fail the evaluation immediately.

Any of the following behaviors may result in a rating of "Not Ready":

- Dogs sniffing excessively, so as to interfere with appropriate walking on a leash.
- Handlers who use force or an excessively loud voice in an attempt to control the dog.

- Dogs exhibiting excessive shyness.
- Dogs barking or vocalizing excessively.
- Dogs urinating or defecating during testing.
- Dogs charging ahead of the handler going through the door.

Note: Any dog that displays unruly behavior at any time must be automatically disqualified and immediately removed from the test area. Unruly behavior is defined as aggression, growling, or lunging at people and/or dogs, biting or attempting to bite and fighting. Usually a dog jumping on people or other dogs will be rated "Not Ready".

Additional:

- Dogs are rated as "Pass" or "Not Ready".
- Handlers who shout or mishandle their dogs will be cautioned that such conduct is not acceptable and will not earn certification if such handling continues.
- Heavy collar pressure or jerking on the leash or collar to maintain control is not acceptable and will be rated as "Not Ready".
- No treats, food, toys or other training aids may be offered or carried during testing.
- Greyhounds are not required to sit for testing.
- Handlers of dogs, which receive a "Not Ready" rating, will be encouraged to continue working with their dogs and given tips on how to improve the dog's performance.
- The LifeLine Canada Foundation issues a Companion Paws Vest, Identification Card and Certificate for dogs rated "Passed" in the evaluation.

A dog's skills diminish without practice. It is important for owners to continue to work with the dog in perpetuity, in order to maintain peak performance and also for the satisfaction of both owner and dog. In addition, Certified Therapy dogs are retested every year in order to keep their Companion Paws Canada Therapy dog certification.