

THERAPUTIC USES OF DOGS

Background

A Therapeutic or Therapy Dog, as defined in this Appendix, is a dog owned by a third-party Therapeutic Dog Handler (or “Handler”) and the dog and Handler team come to a school or workplace to engage in activities that support students or employees either educationally or emotionally. An example of these activities includes stress reduction visits near exam times with one or several Dog and Handler teams present and a schedule of student visits. Dogs are the only animal species approved by the District to be used in schools or workplaces for therapeutic, emotional support, or similar purposes.

Definitions

Therapeutic Dog Handler (or “Handler” or “Dog Handler”)

A trained adult who controls a Therapeutic Dog. Employees and students of the District may not serve as Therapeutic Dog Handlers at District schools or workplaces.

Therapeutic Dog and Handler Team (or “Dog and Handler”)

A trained and certified third party adult and dog which has been trained or certified by an organization approved by the District.

Emotional Support Animal or Companion Animal

An animal, often a dog, which an individual owns as their pet and keeps with them most of the time to address and augment their personal emotional or psychological state. Emotional Support Animals and Companion Animals differ greatly from assistance, guide, or service dogs as stipulated in the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act and referred to as Assistance Dogs by the District. Emotional Support or Companion Animals are not equivalent to certified Therapeutic or Therapy Dogs.

Procedures

The District approves of Therapeutic Dog and Handler Teams trained by and actively part of the Saint John’s Ambulance’s Therapy Dog Program (Vancouver Chapter). Any Dog and Handler Teams not associated with the Saint John’s Ambulance (SJA), must demonstrate to the District, via the Director of Learning Services, equivalent or better standards of training for vulnerable populations, liability coverage, and other requirements set by Saint John’s Ambulance.

1. Therapeutic Dog activities acceptable to the District are those operated by third parties with certified Therapeutic Dog and Handler team(s) and which meet the following criteria:
 - 1.1 A District employee must serve as the sponsor for the Therapeutic Dog activity at the school or site.

- 1.2 The sponsor employee must submit a plan and proposal regarding the Therapeutic Dog(s) activity to the principal for approval from the Principal and the Director of Instruction, Learning Services.
 - 1.3 Any proposal must be submitted a minimum of four (4) weeks in advance of the planned activity start date.
 - 1.4 Therapeutic Dog activities are optional activities and must be approved by the Principal or the Director of Instruction, Learning Services. These activities can be cancelled at any time by the Principal or Director of Instruction, Learning Services.
 - 1.5 Neither employees nor students are permitted to be a Therapeutic Dog owner or Handler for District approved activities. Counsellors or other school-based employees must act in addition to third-party Therapeutic Dog Handler(s) to provide support to students during these activities.
 - 1.6 Therapeutic Dog and Handler teams must be certified by organizations with standards which meet or exceed Saint John's Ambulance Therapy Dog Program (Vancouver chapter) or equivalent for the provision of Therapeutic Dog visits with vulnerable populations, such as at schools, seniors' facilities, and hospitals.
 - 1.7 The Handler of a certified Therapeutic Dog team must have successfully passed a criminal record check acceptable to the District; typically this would be the vulnerable population criminal records check required by the Ministry of Education for District employees and volunteers.
 - 1.8 Handlers, or the organization they operate under, must carry a minimum of two (2) million dollars in liability insurance which is confirmed in writing by the Handler or organization to cover any liabilities associated with the provision of Therapeutic Dog activities.
 - 1.9 Therapeutic Dogs permitted in schools must not be on a diet of raw food.
 - 1.10 Handler and Therapeutic Dog teams working in schools must be retested at least every two (2) years by the certifying or overseeing organization.
 - 1.11 In advance of working independently as a Therapeutic Dog Handler in a school or workplace, new Therapeutic Dogs and their Handlers must have been shadowed by experienced and certified Therapeutic Dog Handler(s) for a minimum of six (6) vulnerable population visits.
2. The therapeutic use of dogs is acceptable to the District when conducted as a one-time activity or a limited scheduled activity, where the visits are relatively short in duration to allow for the dog(s) to rest and recover. Such therapeutic use of dogs in schools is not to occur daily or continue regularly for weeks or months at a time.
 3. The District does not support students, employees, visitors, or volunteers bringing their personal Emotional Support or Companion Animals, including dogs, with them to a school or work.

4. An employee's pet dog may not serve as a Therapeutic or Emotional Support Dog at any site in the District.

References:
BC Guide Dogs Act

Adopted:
June 2023