

Introduction Letter

Greetings from Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare,

Thank you very much for your interest in Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare (TMH) Animal Therapy. TMH is eager to engage with you and your animal and is happy to provide the following overview.

Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy is a highly-valued community asset that coordinates visits by volunteer animal therapy teams to multiple facilities within the Leon County/Big Bend area including long term care facilities, assisted living facilities, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, day care centers for adults with limited abilities, hospices, libraries, bookstores, courthouses and public and private schools.

Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy volunteers also participate in the R.E.A.D. "Reading Education Assistance Dogs" program as well as the Courthouse Therapy Dogs program for the Second Judicial Circuit of Florida. TMH interacts with diverse clients to provide improved mental health, motivation, recreation, education, rehabilitation, pain management, and other therapeutic services. Each animal therapy team has one human and one animal. Therapy animals are typically dogs; however, cats, mini horses, and other domesticated animals can be effective team member.

Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy teams are trained according to national standards and each team must pass a skills/aptitude test and the animals must be examined by a veterinarian to ensure good health. Please visit www.tmh.org/animaltherapy for further information about the Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy program.

Qualifications:

Animal: Only domesticated animal species may become therapy animals. Dogs/cats must be at least one year old by the anticipated date of the formal evaluation. They must be healthy and free from parasites, disease, and infection. Animals with disabilities will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Dogs that have been trained to aggressively protect and/or have been encouraged to bite, even if it is a component of a dog sport such as bite work that is part of Schutzhund may not be animal therapy volunteers. Pocket animals must be 6 months of age to participate.

Handler: Pet handlers must be 14 or older (with guardian participation and written consent if under 18)

Very important: The human MUST show us a copy of the animal's up-to-date vaccination records. A rabies tag is not acceptable. A document signed by a veterinarian is required.

Steps toward becoming a certified Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy team:

- Step 1) Pass the initial screening evaluation and reserve a place in a Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy training class
- Step 2) Attend the Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy training classes
- Step 3) Complete Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy registration paperwork
- Step 4) Pass the formal Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy evaluation

Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy typically begins a new training class each spring and fall. Contact Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy for details.

Step 1 - Pass the initial screening evaluation and reserve your place in a Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy training class

The purpose of Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy's initial screening evaluation is to determine the readiness and aptitude of your animal to benefit from the training class. Your animal's basic obedience skills and friendliness toward strangers will be evaluated. The evaluation takes approximately 10 minutes. You will be asked to have your animal perform the following basic commands: ***Sit, Stay, Down, Come, Walking beside you on a leash without pulling.*** Unlike obedience competitions, you and your animal do not have to perform with precision. You will have a 5- week training course to work on any skills deficits.

How your animal reacts during a number of "challenges" including an examination (of paws, eyes, ears, body) by a stranger, a hug by a stranger, and proximity to loud noises and crowds will be observed. It is acceptable if the animal is startled by noise, but should recover quickly. Unacceptable behaviors will negate your animal's acceptance into the Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy program. Unacceptable behaviors include, but are not limited at this time to: ***Snarling, growling, snapping, pawing, extreme nervousness or shyness, excessive barking, signs of aggression towards other dogs or people, jumping up on people or other dogs.*** Dogs should be well socialized prior to acceptance into the training classes – obviously, this is important both for those visited, and for the enjoyment of you and your animal during a visit.

After successfully passing the initial screening, you may reserve a place in Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy's training class by paying a non-refundable, not-transferable **\$60 training fee.**

Step 2 - Attend the Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy training classes

The purpose of the training class is to provide you and your animal with the skills to successfully visit the facilities served by Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy. There are two phases of class instruction:

- a) Three 2.5-hours of classroom learning which covers an introduction to the many programs offered through Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy as well as the basics of animal behavior.
- b) One hour-long Introduction to science and behavior-based training methods.
- c) Six approximately hour-long weekly sessions attended by you with your dog, are provided with simulated facility encounters such as wheel chairs, walkers and crowded hallways along with role playing with volunteers to practice elements of an actual visit, and other exercises to maximize skills. There is also a focus on understanding your animal's "language" and stress signals so that you can effectively and productively manage your animal's interactions with patients/others. Instructors use patience, praise and positive training methods to acclimate the animals to the sights, sounds and smells of an actual Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy visit. While in training, you are required to "shadow" (i.e. observe, without your pet) an actual Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy visit. During classes there will be the opportunity for you and your animal to practice the skills/behaviors you observed on the shadow visit.

Step 3 - Complete certification paperwork

During the workshop, you will be given an application packet. During the Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy training classes you will be assisted in completing the required forms. Completion of the training classes and application packet is required before we schedule your evaluation.

Step 4 - Pass the formal Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy evaluation

You and your animal will be evaluated in Tallahassee by a Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy evaluator. The evaluation takes approximately 25 minutes and consists of the Basic Training Skills and the Therapy Skills.

Equipment required during screening, classes and evaluation

Acceptable equipment:

- Premier Gentle Leader Easy-Walk Harness
- Halti Harness
- Freedom Harness
- Sense-ation Harness
- Sense-ible Harness
- Body or step-in harnesses (leash clips to a ring on the back of the animal)
- Buckle, snap, quick-release collars (leather or fabric)
- Limited slip collars (Martingales), if they do not include metal links
- Halters/head collars
- Leashes, no more than 6 feet in length, that are all-leather or all-fabric
- Metal hardware, such as buckles, slip rings, and D-rings

Unacceptable equipment:

- Metal collars and harnesses, including martingales with metal links.
- Slip collars of any type, and "no-pull" or "no-jump" harnesses (e.g. Sporn).
- Special training collars such as "pinch," "spike," electric, or spray collars.
- Metal chain and retractable leashes (e.g., Flexi-leash).

Metal and moving parts are unacceptable because they have potential for pinching a facility resident. Moving/slipping parts and long leashes can catch and tangle in facility equipment, putting both your animal and the resident at risk of injury. If you cannot control your animal without using unacceptable equipment, then it is not ready to become a therapy animal.

Food Treats

Treats are allowed and encouraged during your screening, training classes, evaluation and during Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy visits in facilities. Many Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy handlers utilize small treat bags clipped to belt.

On behalf of Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy, thank you for your interest in this exceedingly positive program. TMH look forward to many *pawsitive* experiences with you and your animal!

Sincerely,

Stephanie Perkins

Stephanie Perkins

Director

