

LEARNING GOALS

This course is designed to teach you effective positive reinforcement training skills and to teach your dog the 13 core skills and behaviors that therapy dog teams must be able to perform. You'll learn to read your dog's body language as well as how to keep therapy work sustainable and joyful for your team and therapeutic for those you are trying to help.

Upon successfully completing the course, you will be able to:

1. Teach your dog the 13 skills covered in most therapy dog evaluations and execute them as a team confidently.
2. Assess your dog's readiness for both the KPA SkillCheck assessment and a therapy dog certification evaluation.
3. Construct a training environment that sets up you and your dog for success.
4. Use the training process to fill in any existing gaps in the dog's or the handler's skills.
5. Take a therapy dog certification test with confidence when you and your dog are ready.
6. Explain the pros and cons of joining a therapy dog organization and use those pros and cons to determine if you would like to join an organization or conduct therapy visits on your own.
7. Describe the benefits of therapy work for target populations and therapy dog teams.
8. Describe the expectations of therapy dog teams and describe the temperament traits that indicate that a dog may enjoy, and be successful at, therapy work.
9. Describe typical health and grooming requirements for therapy dogs.
10. Choose the therapy dog working environments and populations that will best suit your dog.
11. Use the positive reinforcement training process to build your dog's therapy work skills and strengthen your relationship with your dog.
12. Train reliable behaviors without corrections or physical control.
13. Communicate effectively and consistently with your dog during training and in the working environment.
14. Set up training sessions to accelerate your dog's learning.
15. Use both food and conditioned non-food reinforcers so that you are prepared for therapy visits where food rewards may not be an option.

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Through instruction, training exercises, videos, and remote coaching, you will teach your dog to be comfortable and confident performing the required skills and behaviors under conditions that simulate therapy dog work.

16. Fade out food reinforcers in preparation for a therapy dog evaluation.
17. Transfer your dog's new skills from one environment to others, including novel environments.
18. Teach your dog to remain comfortable and relaxed encountering novel and strange objects.
19. Teach your dog to remain comfortable and relaxed during petting and handling by strangers.
20. Teach your dog to remain comfortable and relaxed around loud, strange, or sudden noises.
21. Teach your dog to remain comfortable and relaxed around strangers and crowds.
22. Teach your dog to remain comfortable and relaxed around other dogs.
23. Teach your dog additional useful behaviors applicable to therapy work, such as Settle on a Mat and Chin Targeting.
24. Read canine body language, including signs of both stress and relaxation.
25. Identify and support your dog's needs and preferences during therapy work.
26. Prepare your dog for the range of common environments that a therapy team might encounter.
27. Anticipate common stressors that your dog may encounter during therapy visits and prevent or minimize stress for your therapy dog proactively.
28. Take appropriate action if your dog appears to be stressed during training or therapy work.
29. Communicate, and advocate for, your dog's needs and preferences to others effectively in therapy visit environments.
30. Identify and evaluate signs that it is time to retire your team from therapy work.
31. Continue building and/or maintaining your dog's skills and your team's effectiveness after the course ends.