

Therapy Dog Training

Specialized K9 Services
1451 Charlotte Hwy
Fairview, NC 28730
828-290-0923
www.sk9s.com

Specialized K9 Services (SK9S) impacts the quality of life for thousands of children, adults and seniors throughout North East, NC and Southern portions of Virginia. Our therapy dogs provide the catalyst for positive change by motivating emotionally and physically challenged individuals. We open dialogue with the abused, disabled, sick, lonely, injured, or depressed. Our programs inspire learning and change - and include everyone. Our certified therapy dog teams are personally committed to bring joy and inspiration to every human life we touch. Rooted in the strength of the unique human-to-animal bond, our programs reach beyond traditional forms of rehabilitation and treatment. Let our team of certified therapy dogs erase the language barrier, and start making a difference in your life today! We're ready to show you how.

What is a Therapy Dog?

A therapy dog is a friend to everyone! Therapy dogs are extremely patient and loving - and provide great companionship. Specialized K9 Services brings only the best-natured, and most well-trained dogs to your location. Reliability and training is the backbone of our agency. We visit hospitals, rehabilitation and hospice facilities, schools, senior centers, nursing communities, homeless shelters, homes for the youth at-risk, bereavement centers and beyond. Our successful outreach programs are tailored to meet your specific needs...and our programs are growing every day! If you're looking for emotional or physical support, look no further - you've come to the right place. Anyone can benefit from the unique animal-to-human bond. It's not just our mission; it's our personal commitment to you.



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What Does a Therapy Dog Do?



Sometimes a therapy dog just sits or lies quietly while being petted - listening to story after story about a nursing home resident's former dog. Sometimes a therapy dog will visit an elementary school to help teach children about the humane care of animals, or join in during story time to help relax the group. But, did you know that a therapy dog can help a child to learn? A child who has difficulty reading is the perfect candidate to curl up alongside a therapy dog to enjoy a good book. Studies show children find the non-judgmental ears of a therapy dog the perfect choice to hone and improve their reading skills. A therapy dog may also work with disabled or autistic children. In a hospital setting, a therapy dog might visit patients in pediatrics, oncology, or even hospice centers. Sometimes a hospital will invite a therapy dog to visit the emergency room because of the calming effect on patients, doctors, nurses and staff members working in the high-stress environment.

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How Can a Therapy Dog Help?

Visiting with animals can help you feel less lonely and less depressed. People are more active and responsive both during - and after - a visit with animals. Medical studies and clinical research show that a therapy dog can not only have medical benefits - such as stress relief, or lower blood pressure - but provide a sense of comfort, confidence, and companionship.



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Training Requirements

The first items of concern are health and cleanliness standards. I use the requirements set by Specialized K9 Services, for qualification for the SK9S test. These include the following:

1. Proof of current Rabies vaccination.
2. Proof of Health, such as a current health certificate from a Veterinarian.
3. Visible cleanliness, no sign of fleas / ticks, clean ears etc.
4. Dog must appear healthy, alert and not grossly over or under weight.
5. Yearly physical and stool check.
6. Annual Heartworm Test

Basic Obedience Requirements

The next items are the basic obedience requirements of the **AKC/CGC** Test. I will list them in condensed form in this article, but the dogs must be able to fulfill those requirements before completing this course, or it would be a waste of time for the owner and dog alike.

1. Appearance and Grooming

The dog must appear well groomed, clean and must permit a stranger to groom him.

2. Accepting a Stranger

The handler must shake hand with a stranger, the dog must not shy or show resentment. Neither must he approach the stranger.

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Basic Obedience Requirements (cont'd)

3. Walk on Loose lead:

The dog must walk to the left of handler, doesn't have to "heel"

4. Walk through crowd

Exercise is done in a crowd of people and dogs that are strangers. The Dog should not have a problem negotiating foot traffic. May show interest in strangers, but not to the extent that he strains at the lead or show resentment.

5. Sit for exam

Dog must allow a stranger to approach him and pat him, may not exhibit shyness or resentment.

6. Sit and Down on command

Designed to demonstrate that the dog has had some formal training. The dog must respond readily to the handlers command. No force may be used, but more than one command is allowed.

7. Stay in position

In either a sit or down, the dog must remain in the position commanded by his handler until the evaluator allows the handler to release.

8. Reaction to another dog

The dog should demonstrate no more than casual interest in a strange dog.

9. Reaction to distractions

A test of confidence, the dog may show surprise when presented with noises and distractions, but not run away or show aggressiveness.

10. Dog left alone

This test shows that a dog has good manners and training. **The handler hands the dog lead to a stranger*** and leaves the room. The evaluator **stays with the dog***, observing that there is no excessive stress, nervousness or agitation.

(*amended by AKC in 1998, many CGC testers will attempt to still tie your dog to a stationary object. If this occurs, run, don't walk to AKC and inform them of this info. It mans the tester is not keeping up with AKC rules and regs as well as keeping thier training updated.)

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Amendments that SK9S has made to the above tests to adapt it to therapy needs are as follows:

1. Tell the handler that you are going to touch the dog all over, handling it heavily. Ask if there is any reason that the dog will not allow you to be all over it. All handling is done at the dogs level.
2. Add patting the dog on the head, and conversing with handler.
3. Make a big deal about the brushing and combing. As you do this, drop your clipboard, made a large motion with your arm or body in an attempt to elicit an unusual reaction. Check the dog's nails for proper length, and comment on long nails to owner.
4. Ask the handler to do an obedience routine that is familiar to them; you may call it if they are familiar with that method. Otherwise, have them walk changing directions when you ask, watching them for control and ease of handling.
5. Use the other test takers as a crowd. Use all the dogs and handlers as a group no more than 6 at a time) to test sociability.
6. Sits and Downs are needed in therapy work, so must be done properly.
7. Join in with the handler in praising the dog.
8. Use another dog and handler from the group as greeter for each other using different ones for each dog.
9. Use a variety of noises, stumble near the dog exhibit jerky motions near the dog. Do not attempt to scare the dog from behind.
10. A volunteer handler **HOLDS*** the leash while the owner leaves the room.
(*Amended by AKC in 1998)
11. Demonstrates WAIT command proficiently.

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Course Outline

The Therapy Dog training course involves at least three group field trips, and several weeks of "in-school" acclimation and desensitizing. The number of in-school classes is adjusted to the needs of the group. All field trips are planned in advance, with permission from the management of the facility we intend to visit. We carefully explain what the group is trying to accomplish, and are usually given carte blanche after a few test runs. Our field trips involve visits to places such as:

- shopping centers (which would include shopping carts, escalators and possibly people on crutches and wheel chairs)
- public access buildings which would allow us use of their elevators
- restaurants during dead time (which will allow us to give the dogs access to food and people in an unfamiliar atmosphere. This is because many nursing homes allow food in the rooms and rec. areas, and the dogs need to know how to behave around it)
- downtown, or a busy foot and car traffic spot to let the dogs get used to noises and bustle.
- hospitals and nursing homes with geriatric, but non Alzheimer patients (the last visit before qualification) We usually take field trips in groups of 3 or 4 people. The reason for this should be fairly obvious. The less dogs there are, the more control can be had over a given situation. Of course, once a group has become inured to stressful situations, adjustments can be made.

In-school acclimatization and desensitizing can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Here I will attempt to relate some of our methods. All classes last about 1 to 1 1/2 hour for each session.

One of the students at our school happens to be confined to a motorized wheel chair. During the duration of one class, we recruit her to handle each of our dogs, one at a time, in heel position, on a loose lead, and approaching and leaving from the rear of the dog. The dog owner's assistance is of course needed, but this exercise allows the dogs a non threatening introduction to the sound and motion of the chair, as well as being exposed for the full length of a class to a new object. When not being handled by the person in the chair, the dog is walked around the room and near the chair occasionally.

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Course Outline *(cont'd)*

Another class requires the assistance of several persons not actually taking the class. These people enter the classroom on crutches and walkers. They simply walk around the dogs as we conduct our usual routine for that session. The usual routine would include standing for exams, walking on loose leads with distractions (the crutches!), handling by a stranger (checking teeth, ears and grooming) and down stays with the owner in sight. The dogs' steadiness and reliability is put to the test in this exercise.

The point of these tests is not pass/fail, they allow the handler to understand the flexibility and range to which their dog is able to tolerate new challenges. The exception would be a dog who snaps, growls or bites of course, this dog would prove unfit for this work, and not be allowed to complete the course.

We also try to obtain an item which makes the same whistling / clapping sound as a respirator. Several nursing homes allow us to bring the dogs into an empty room with a respirator running. If this is not possible for you, try to improvise. That particular sound seems to be one that takes practice for most dogs to tolerate.

About 1/2 of a class session is devoted to drilling on the normal CGC requirements. This includes dogs being left alone, loud noises behind the dog, reactions to distractions, and reactions to loud exchanges. With any distraction we use, we try to emulate actual nursing home conditions. Bedpans and walkers are very loud when dropped near the dog. The dog must be allowed to examine the item after his reaction, and reassured. A folded wheelchair is also very loud, and safe if done at a distance. Remember, when you are in a nursing home or hospital, you must expect the unexpected.

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Course Outline *(cont'd)*

That same class session, what is left of it, can be used to test the sociability of the class as a unit. This exercise is best conducted after the dogs have been around each other for a short period of time, to reduce the excitement factor. Each dog owner approaches another handler and carries on a short conversation. During the chat, the dogs must not touch or approach each other, but sit, lie or stand quietly by the handler's side until the visit is over. Dogs who display excitement in this exercise require more drilling in groups before being allowed to work in a group setting. Many times more than one dog is present in a therapy group, therefore a responsible owner must be aware of the reaction of their dog to others, and know if it is necessary to do therapy sessions alone with their dog.

A final classroom session is devoted to preparing the students for conditions they may encounter in a nursing home and/or hospital setting. This is a very important class. We generally try to find as Speaker an activities director from a nursing home or hospital, one that is well versed in explaining to lay persons the many problems and needs of residents. Some situations that may arise such as "grabby" patients, or patients that yell and flail about, must be explained to new therapy students. Preparation for these situations eases the discomfort and awkwardness for many people prior to exposure

The final Field Trip is usually to a nursing home as a group for a real Therapy Visit. We try to coordinate with the activities director previously consulted, in an effort to make the students more comfortable. The students are broken down into groups of three, each group visiting its' own area. There must be a supervisor with each group. If this proves difficult, we make several different appointments and stagger the visits. After all the students have completed a visit successfully, we then schedule the SK9S modified CGC test.

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Testing Fees

The fee for a SK9S Evaluation of a dog/handler team should not exceed \$100. However, if the test site charges a fee for the use of their location or the Evaluator must travel to the location of the test, the fee may be higher.

Course Fee (this will include testing and certification) \$ 300.00

Or if you have completed CGC and Basic Obedience you may test per the following:

Testing fees are charged per dog:
Each K9 \$100.00