

Therapy Dog Planning Checklist

The principal provides a copy of *AP 332 Therapy Dogs in Schools* and this checklist to the Therapy Dog owner and reviews the documents together.

The principal receives proof from the Therapy Dog Handler of training certification, up-to-date vaccinations, dog license, and proof the dog is in good health and forwards this information to the Deputy Director of Corporate Services.

The principal shares the rationale for the inclusion of a Therapy Dog with staff, invites staff input around planning considerations based on students in classes where the Therapy Dog may be present, and gathers information regarding allergies, phobias, or other concerns. A Therapy Dog may be excluded from the school or parts of the school when there is a risk to the health or physical and/or mental well-being of students or staff.

The principal sets up a team meeting to discuss concerns or questions brought forward by the staff. Target classrooms and students should also be discussed.

A planning meeting with the Therapy Dog Handler should be arranged with the following discussed:

- The purpose and function of the Therapy Dog and the support it will provide students in areas such as the following: anxiety, self-regulation, trauma, social skills, compassion and empathy, self-esteem, memory, problem solving, and/or motivation to move.
- Clarification that the Handler is solely responsible for the overall care and any costs associated with the Therapy Dog.
- Plan for personal care of the Therapy Dog during the school day including bio breaks and disposal of waste.
- Plan for educating the school staff on the role of the Therapy Dog and the rules of conduct concerning interactions with the dog. Include plans for classroom and other areas of school such as hallway and recess if applicable. Consider routines that need to be established and expectations/rules of conduct for students and staff around the Therapy Dog.
- Discuss which areas of the school the Therapy Dog will have access to and what entrance will be used.
- Discuss dates/plan for integration of the Therapy Dog to the school and/or classes.

The principal will ask the Therapy Dog Handler to complete the agreement for Therapy Dog Services and will forward a copy to the Director or Designate.

Once the plan to integrate a Therapy Dog has been established, the principal will send a letter home to parents/guardians of students in the school to inform them, and offer to answer questions or address any concerns (see templates attached). The principal will also inform the School Community Council.

Arrange for the Therapy Dog to first visit the school when students are not present in order to familiarize the dog to the school site and facilitate planning.

Collaborate with the Handler to develop an appropriate emergency plan that will include a plan for evacuation, lock down, fire drills, and any other relevant procedures.

Ensure signage is placed on each entry door of the school to inform visitors of the presence of a Therapy Dog (Please be aware a St. John's Therapy Dog may be present in our school to support various student learning and well-being goals).

Monitor and review documentation annually to ensure that all certification, vaccination, licenses, and agreement is updated.

Maintain open communication with parents/guardians, staff, and School Community Council to proactively address concerns as they arise.

Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians of Classes Where the Therapy Dog will be Present

(SCHOOL LETTERHEAD)

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This letter is to inform you that there will be a Therapy Dog in our school to assist our students in developing skills in the following areas (choose from these options or include your own: self-regulation, anxiety, social skills, trauma, compassion and empathy, self-esteem, memory, problem solving, and/or motivation to move). The Therapy Dog is certified through St. John's Ambulance Therapy Dog Program and is able to support the development of various skills related to student learning and well-being.

This Therapy Dog will be part of your child's class (indicate frequency such once per week). All students in the school will be instructed as to the proper procedures around appropriately interacting with the Therapy Dog.

If you have questions or concerns regarding the presence of the Therapy Dog in your child's class, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your understanding and support in this matter.

Sincerely,

Principal

Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians of Students in School (for Classes Where the Therapy Dog will NOT be Present)

(SCHOOL LETTERHEAD)

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This letter is to inform you that there will be a Therapy Dog in our school to assist our students in developing skills in the following areas (choose from these options or include your own: self-regulation, anxiety, social skills, trauma, compassion and empathy, self-esteem, memory, problem solving, and/or motivation to move). The Therapy Dog is certified through St. John's Ambulance Therapy Dog Program and is able to support the development of various skills related to student learning and well-being.

While the Therapy Dog will not be in your child's classroom, all students in the school will be instructed as to the proper procedures around appropriately interacting with the Therapy Dog as they may come in contact with it in other areas of the school.

If you have questions or concerns regarding the presence of the Therapy Dog in our school, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your understanding and support in this matter.

Sincerely,

Principal