

DOG LIFE

Pet therapy

■ BY HARRY KALAJIAN

The importance of pet therapy can't be measured but can be seen.

Pet therapy in this article is based mostly on dogs, even though many different pets can be used to provide comfort for those of us who need it, children, adults and seniors. Pet therapy dogs are used for both personal activities at home and for visits to hospitals, senior living facilities and even people's homes. These dogs are and have to be very friendly, and obedient enough to not get overexcited and unintentionally injure someone.

When therapy dogs visit patients in hospitals or senior centers, what they bring to the people is comfort, unconditional love, happiness and elevated morale. There is no single breed of dog that does this type of work. If the dog is calm and has a good character and temperament, it qualifies. However, it is important that the dog is obedient and can be controlled through verbal commands at all times.

Many times you might see smaller dogs being used for certain visits to certain places, while bigger dogs are often visiting different locations. (There is no rule about this.)

When patients in hospitals interact with the dogs, their morale is uplifted. It not only makes the people happy but always makes them look forward to the next visit. The pet therapy dog is simply helping comfort people who are alone, lonely and dealing with medical or mental issues.

People who are alone or lonely – especially if they own or have owned a pet themselves – are motivated to get up and get walking. As they play or just sit with the pet, it puts a smile on their face as well as soothes their mind and body.



Children and adults with autism find comfort with a therapy dog, not only by petting but also by interacting with it. Personal pets or therapy dogs sense when a person is sad or hurting, and that is why they will cuddle or love the person unconditionally. Many people love to just pet the dog, which gives them comfort, and in return the dog enjoys being petted. It's a win/win situation.

Therapy dogs can help children and adults, wheth-

er in or out of hospitals, to walk. They encourage those patients who have lost the desire to walk to get on their feet.

People who own dogs that are helping them cope with the daily rituals of life often perceive themselves as having a therapy dog. If these people need to travel using public conveyances, they must have a letter from their doctor stating that the dog is to be considered as an emotional service dog.

Also, a letter from the dog's veterinarian should be available showing that the pet is up-to-date on its vaccines, and it would be good to have a letter from a professional dog trainer stating that the dog has had professional obedience training and won't be a public nuisance.

Although this topic has much more to it, the most important point is that, if we really look at it, all pets one way or another are therapeutic.

As long as your dog has a good temperament and loves people (especially children), it will be a good candidate as a therapy dog.

Training isn't hard as long as you are willing to put in the time and follow my formula to have success: patience, persistence, consistency and repetition. If you still fail, it's on you, not your dog. You didn't stick to the formula.

Have a woof woof of a month.

*Harry Kalajian M.D.T.
With over 35 years experience
All Aspect of training, Behaviorist,
Ethologist & Psychologist
Executive Dog Training Inc.
941-447-8234
executivedogtraining.com*