



## **ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS (AAI)**

### **Therapy Animal Implementation Guide**



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## Implementation Procedure

- ☐ **Deadlines for submitting the permission form and sign up for mandatory training are:**
  - ☐ 1st of August or 1st of December (all permissions received after the 1st of July will be put on hold until mandatory training in January is completed, animals will not be permitted while authorization is on hold).
- (Handler with therapy animal will not receive permission without completed training)**
- ☐ Get verbal approval from school Principal.
- ☐ Review Policy and Procedures (Documents can be found at: <https://www.dcsdk12.org/human-resources-for-employees/welcome-to-the-americans-with-disabilities-act-ada-website>)
  - ☐ Complete requirements established within the policy.
- ☐ Certify yourself and your animal through a recognized organization. See below.
  - ☐ **Animals that are trained by Pet Partners are only allowed 2 hours a day for volunteer work in a location other than the handler's workplace. Pet Partner trained animals are not permitted to be used as part of professional activities.**
- ☐ Obtain Professional Liability Coverage for yourself and the animal. (DCSD recommends a minimum coverage of \$1MM) **(DCSD funds (P-cards) are not permitted to be used to purchase a liability insurance for the animal.)**
- ☐ For School Social Workers: National Association of Social Workers offers Professional Liability Coverage with a Canine Therapy Ryder (if animal is a dog)
  - ☐ Consider looking through your Homeowners policy for coverage
  - ☐ Lockton Insurance Covers Animal Assisted Therapy
  - ☐ HPSO also covers Animal Assisted Therapy
    - ☐ The majority of these providers require the provider to be in a therapeutic profession and/or have some form of education/certification in AAI
- ☐ Complete The Therapy Animal Request Form and attach all required documents to the form.(Including the Memorandum of Understanding) (<https://www.dcsdk12.org/human-resources-for-employees/welcome-to-the-americans-with-disabilities-act-ada-website>). The ADA Manager will be in contact with you, after form and documents have been received. (Please do not submit form without required documents)
- ☐ Attend Professional Development Training (approximately 3 hours)



- ☐ Session facilitated by DCSD AAI Committee
  
- ☐ Do a walk-through of the building with the ADA Manager to help implement the program.
  - ☐ Set up a meeting with handler and school administration to go over questions, concerns and to ensure that the program is ethical and in the best interest of the school, the animal, staff, student and community.
  - ☐ Facilitator assists in the implementation process
  
- ☐ Identify areas in the school the animal will be working
  - ☐ Identify restricted areas (i.e. Cafeteria, nurse's office, etc.)
  - ☐ Designate an area where the animal can go in a crisis situation
  - ☐ Establish what will happen with the animal in case of a crisis situation
  - ☐ Designate a person that you could hand off the therapy animal to in case of a crisis in which the handler becomes unavailable to meet the needs of the student and keep the animal safe.
  
- ☐ Work with custodial staff to schedule extra cleanings of utilized areas
  
- ☐ Work with school nurse to identify students with allergy concerns
  - ☐ Contact families on list to inform and answer questions about program
  - ☐ [DCSD AAI Allergy Email](#)
  
- ☐ Identify students that would be consistently working with the therapy animal
  - ☐ Contact families
  - ☐ Provide [DCSD Permission Slip for AAI](#)
  - ☐ Establish goals and specific interventions for each student
  
- ☐ Inform school staff
  
- ☐ Send [DCSD Letter to Families](#)
  
- ☐ Announce program to the student body
  - ☐ Explain who the animal is and why they are at school
  - ☐ Include expectations and boundaries with students
    - ☐ Ask to pet
    - ☐ No running, yelling, unsafe behavior around animal, etc.
    - ☐
  
- ☐ Begin introducing your animal
  - ☐ Ethical Consideration



## Recognized Therapy Animal Certification and AAI Certification Organizations

- **Professional Therapy Dogs of Colorado (PTDC)**
  - Available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc).
  - PTDC offers pre-screenings to see where your dog is at in the process. They also offer a 2 day seminar in which the handler is able to learn more about the implementation process and ways to keep both your therapy dog and your clients safe
  - PTDC also provides you with a manual to help with implementation
  - PTDC also offers continued support of you and your Therapy Animal; they also require you to re-certify your dog every two years to make sure they are still enjoying their work as a Therapy dog.
  - Do not provide liability insurance.
  - Cost= \$300 (includes pre-screen, 2 day workshop, manual, test and certification)
  - [www.professionaltherapydogsofcolorado.com](http://www.professionaltherapydogsofcolorado.com)
- **Pawsitive Therapeutic Interventions (PTI)**
  - Available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc).
  - Offer canine assisted therapy workshops, which certify humans and their dog.
  - PTI offers a 1-day seminar that focuses on different techniques to implement AAI in your practice.
  - In order to be certified through PTI your dog must first be Canine Good Citizen Certified (Which can be done at a local PetSmart or Petco) once they are certified as a CGC.
  - PTI requires recertification every year and offers support throughout your dog's career
  - Do not provide liability insurance
  - Cost=\$300 (includes 1 day seminar, test and certification)
  - <http://www.pawsitivetherapeutic.org/>
- **Alliance of Therapy Dogs (ATD)**
  - Available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc).
  - National organization that certifies both professional and volunteer teams
  - Requires teams to volunteer at least every 3 months
  - Offer liability insurance through their agency
  - Test includes tester/observer monitoring handler and dog three times at a facility that include two visits to a medical facility
  - Cost=\$40 initial registration fee (possible added fees for certification test)
  - [www.therapydogs.com](http://www.therapydogs.com)



- **Freedom Service Dogs of America (FSD)**
  - For professionals that do not currently have a dog.
  - Pairs professionals in the mental health field with rescued dogs that may not be qualified for a career as a service dog. Training sessions and certification provided.
  - Available to professional therapists, social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, or occupational therapist, or for those seeking a graduate degree in one of the above fields.
  - Support and yearly recertification offered throughout the dog's working life
  - Does not offer specific training/certification in Animal Assisted Interventions
  - [www.freedomservicedogs.org/programs/professional-therapy-dogs/](http://www.freedomservicedogs.org/programs/professional-therapy-dogs/)
  
- **University of Denver-Institute for Human Animal Connections**
  - Does not certify animal. Offers high level education and certification in Animal Assisted Interventions for professionals.
  - The Institute for Human-Animal Connection (IHAC) intentionally elevates the value of the living world and the interrelationship and health of people, other animals and the environment. This is accomplished through natural and social science-informed education, applied knowledge, research and advocacy, with an ethical regard for all species.
  - Nationally recognized certification programs
    - <https://www.du.edu/humananimalconnection/index.html>
  
- **Prestige K9 (Pending)**
  - Offers training to prepare for therapy dog certification.
  
- **Pet Partners (Volunteer activities only)**
  - Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program is a Volunteer-Based Program in which pet owners donate their time to share their animals in the community free of charge. This program is not designed for those using the animal in a professional setting and will therefore have no insurance coverage through Pet Partners
  - Permission through Pet Partners only for 2 hours of volunteer work outside of working hours.



## Ethical Considerations

### (Tailored to Middle and Elementary School Intervention Programs)

The relationship between a handler and their therapy animal should be mutually beneficial; meaning that the Handler, the animal and the clients working with the animal are all benefiting from the working relationship.

### Five Freedom's

- 1) Freedom from Hunger and Thirst
- 2) Freedom from discomfort
- 3) Freedom from pain, injury or disease
- 4) Freedom from fear and distress
- 5) Freedom to express species specific behavior (normal behavior)

### Introducing your animal

You know your animal.

You know your school/program.

This is a detailed suggestion that you may want to follow to ensure your animal enjoys the experience and in turn, the program benefits your school. You want your animal to want to come to work and enjoy his/her time there. Integrating the animal too fast may overwhelm the animal and create behaviors due to the stress of a school environment. Do your best to anticipate and prepare your animal for all encounters. There are going to be situations that your animal may encounter that are unexpected/out of your control; do your best in preparing for how to respond to those situations/create a safety plan for the unexpected.

\* Time each day should be determined based on how the animal is responding to the environment. Some stress is okay and is expected-this is new! If your animal is shying away, hiding, growling, etc. it may be time to end the day. If they are having fun and clearly enjoying their time, keep it going! You may need to repeat steps/days if your animal is showing signs of high stress.

As a reminder, the animal must be approved by the district and school principal before the first day the animal will be present in school.

### DAY 1:

- Walk animal around school but do not enter
  - Play with animal
  - Lots of treats/fun



### **DAY 2:**

- Enter building on a day where no one else is present.
  - Hang out in the room where your animal will spend most of its time
    - Set the expectations immediately
      - Stay on leash, practice commands, etc.
  - Have the animal spend time in its “area”
    - A crate or other enclosure is ideal as it is an area the animal can “escape” to when it needs space or an area they can be when they are not interacting with students/staff
    - The animal should know that this is a space that they can go to and not be bothered; this is their safe place.
- Lots of treats/fun

### **DAY 3:**

- Enter building on a day where no one else is present
  - Walk around the school and have the animal become familiar with all the areas he/she may work in
    - Practice commands and other activities that are fun for the animal that you may use while he/she is working
  - Do not go into areas that are restricted to the animal
    - Cafeteria, classrooms, bathrooms, etc.
    - Going into these areas may confuse them of their boundaries
- Lots of treats/fun

### **DAY 4:**

- Arrange to have a few trusted staff members in the building that your animal may interact with frequently and introduce your animal appropriately
  - Have these people provide treats for your animal when he/she interacts with them appropriately
  - Make it fun and engaging, but make sure to establish expectations for how you want your animal to interact with people at work
  - If there will be times that the animal will be in its crate while you’re not in the room, create opportunity for that to happen
- Lots of treats/fun





### **DAY 5:**

- Come in on a staff work day
  - Introduce your animal to a small group of staff at a time both out in the hallways and in their primary work area
    - Continue to be consistent with work expectations
      - Your animal should know the difference between how to act when working vs not.
  - Spend some time in your office/classroom and let the animal get used to the many sounds and smells that come about with people in the building
  - If there will be times that the animal will be in their crate while you're not in the room, create opportunity for that to happen
  - Lots of treats/fun

### **DAY 6:**

- One more staff work day
  - Repeat the same strategies as Day 5.
  - Work through any behaviors or stressors that may have arisen
  - Before 100's to 1000's of students arrive, your animal should be comfortable with the 40-150 adults in the building
  - Practice utilizing your designated person and safety procedures
    - Make it all fun!
  - Continue to practice commands and, if possible, facilitate a group/session with staff. It will be fun and helpful for the staff to see what type of work you and your animal will be doing with students.

**Next step is to bring your animal in on a school day.**

- If there are still concerning behaviors and/or your animal is showing signs of high levels of stress, repeat day 6 as many times as needed. Please do not rush this process as the more patient and thorough you are, the more comfortable your animal will be which will make a huge difference in the success of the program.

### **DAY \_\_\_\_\_:**

- School Day!
  - Do not have your animal meet with students quite yet, if possible.
    - More new sounds and smells to experience
  - Walk around the halls when students are in their classrooms



- Limit interactions, just allow him/her to get used to the environment and energy that comes with a school full of people
- Lots of treats/fun
- Allow this process to take as much time as needed
  - Be mindful of how your animal may feel in this environment and how overstimulating this experience can be

**DAY :**

- Individual interventions
  - Start with a few students each day whose behaviors are expected and have had interactions with animals throughout their life
    - Make sure to pick students that will follow the rules and listen to you in terms of how to act with the animal.
  - Allow the animal to interact how they want to
    - Don't force an interaction
    - Don't forget the 5 Freedoms
    - Make it all fun!
  - Lots of treats/fun

Keep a routine as much as possible. At this point, you may have learned some new things about your animal; how they show stress, how they show excitement/joy, their favorite people in the school, etc. Keep reading what your animal is communicating to you and advocate for their needs. Remember, if your animal is enjoying their job, it will be a mutually beneficial experience for everyone and you will be amazing at the impact you and your animal will have on your clients, coworkers and the school climate overall!



### Sample Students with Allergies Email

Good Morning,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am the \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ School.  
We are starting a new program here at \_\_\_\_\_ that includes a therapy animal  
\_\_\_\_\_ (enter animal species) coming into our building to work with students that  
need social/emotional support.

Your child is on our list as having an allergy to animals so I wanted to touch base with you to inform  
you of this program and gather any questions/concerns you may have before this program begins.

We will be doing everything we can to be considerate of your child's allergy including ensuring that  
your child does not come into contact with fur/dander/saliva by limiting the areas the animals work,  
having students that do interact with the animals wash their hands after each interaction and being  
aware of any reactions your child may have as a result of the animals working within the building.

A letter will be sent out to the entire school community about this program within the next couple of  
weeks.

Please contact me with any questions/concerns!  
Thank you!



## Sample Letter to Families

Date:

Dear Parents/Guardians:

\_\_\_\_\_ School is excited to announce that an Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI) program is coming to the school to promote social/emotional well-being. AAI is a goal directed intervention, in which an animal that meets specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. This intervention will include a certified professional working within their scope of competency. AAI is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive functioning.

The program may include small group and individual interventions focused on social and emotional wellness and humane education. The \_\_\_\_\_ department at \_\_\_\_\_ will utilize this program through research based practice and interventions specific to the needs of students.

The therapy dog and its handler (have been insured for liability and) have undergone extensive training and certifications for animal-assisted interventions.

Should you have any other questions, concerns or comments, please call/email

\_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_



## Permission Slip For Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAI)

Animal-assisted interventions (AAI) are goal oriented and structured interventions that intentionally incorporate animals in health, education and human service for the purpose of therapeutic gains and improved health and wellness. Animal-assisted therapy (AAT), animal-assisted education (AAE) and animal-assisted activities (AAA) are all forms of AAI.

AAT is a goal directed intervention, in which an animal that meets specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. This intervention will include a certified professional working within their scope of competency. AAT is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive functioning.

AAA's provide opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and therapeutic benefits to enhance quality of life. They are delivered in a variety of environments in association with animals that meet specific criteria.

Although every individual is different, some people who have participated in AAI have experienced the following benefits:

- Animals help improve motivation and engagement in therapy, they build trust and provide a sense of security.
- Animals help in the areas of focus and attention.
- Animals offer unconditional acceptance, and humor and fun in the session as they help facilitate play
- Animals can act as symbols and metaphors in the client's life
- Animals act as agents of de-arousal as they help clients learn soothing and calming skills.
- Animals can be a source of social and emotional support.
- Animals can act as objects of attachment.
- Animals can be instruments of learning.

Although AAI comes with many benefits, it also comes with risks. When working with animals, we **cannot be 100% sure** that their behavior will always be predictable. We will follow the policies and procedures in regards to animal participation.

The animal participating has been medically screened and has passed an evaluation through a recognized organization (i.e. American Kennel Club, Professional Therapy Dogs of Colorado, etc.). **I, and anyone who might claim on my behalf, release staff from liability of any kind arising out of personal injury, and property damage resulting from my participation in AAI at \_\_\_\_\_ School.**



I assume all the foregoing risks and **accept personal responsibility** for all expenses, medical or otherwise following any such damages or injuries, which may in any way, be associated with my participation in AAI through \_\_\_\_\_ School.

**Any known aversions to animals or acts of animal abuse and/or neglect for your child?**  
**Please explain:**

Any known allergies, aversions or history of animal abuse/neglect  
\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact name and number \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions regarding Animal Assisted Interventions may be directed to:**

\_\_\_\_\_ / Staff

E: \_\_\_\_\_ [dcsdk12.org](http://dcsdk12.org) P: 303. \_\_\_\_\_

*Adapted with permission from the Professional Therapy Dogs of Colorado Manual!*



## Student Participation Contract For Animal-Assisted Interventions

1. I agree to try my hardest while working with the therapy dog at \_\_\_\_\_ school. This includes following safety procedure for meeting a dog for the first time. The procedure is to ask for verbal permission from the handler, if granted, allow the dog to smell the top of your hands, and then pet him/her on the neck or an area where the animal can see your hand.
2. When you are meeting a dog for the first time, never stare directly into his/her eyes because dogs read this as a challenge or potential threat.
3. Remain calm while in the dog's presence.
4. Always follow adult direction while with an animal.
5. Always wash hands or use hand sanitizer after you have contact with the dog.
6. Never give the animal something to eat without the permission from the handler.
7. When giving a dog treat, use the open hand method.
8. If you are not following directions or being unsafe with the animal, you may lose the opportunity to work with the therapy dog.
9. If you have questions, please ask!
10. If you are uncomfortable in a situation, use your voice to express this.
11. Students will always be accompanied by an adult while with the animal.
12. I will be aware of what the animal needs by listening, observing, and learning about the animal.
13. If I become angry or frustrated, I will verbalize this to the adult and ask for what I need.
14. Participation with the animal is always a choice.
15. It is ok to take a time out. Please make this request if needed.
16. Please ask for help when needed.
17. Have fun and stay safe!

**I have read the following contract with my parent/guardian and agree to follow these expectations.**

Signature of student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent/guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Questions regarding Animal Assisted Interventions may be directed to:  
\_\_\_\_\_ Staff

E: \_\_\_\_\_ [dcsdk12.org](mailto:dcsdk12.org) P: 303. \_\_\_\_\_

*Adapted with permission from the Professional Therapy Dogs of Colorado Manual*



**(HIGH SCHOOLS ONLY!)**

## Therapy Dog Handler Application Example

### (JUNIOR AND SENIOR STUDENTS ONLY)

#### Mission Statement

Providing stress relief .... (Enter your school) students through the power of positivity and therapy dogs!

Applicant Name/Date \_\_\_\_\_ Off-Period Available: ☐ YES ☐ NO

- Do you like & enjoy being around dogs? Please, detail your experience working with and/or training dogs.
- You will have to go through training to be a handler and it will require time spent outside of the school day. Are you willing/able to do this?
- Are you comfortable as the “Alpha” authority figure leading a dog? Explain your experience:
- The Therapy Dog Lounge is not a space to hang out with your friends. Are you comfortable telling to your friends without a pass that you are “working” and they cannot stay unless they have a pass? Explain, how you would handle this?
- While you are not a Counselor, and are definitely NOT expected to be one, Student Handlers do provide a space for stressed/upset students to engage with our Therapy Dogs. Are you comfortable being the handler in a room with an upset student? Explain your feelings on this subject and relate it to the mission of our program here at .... (Your school’s name).
- **Counselor Recommendation.** If your counselor approves, have him/her sign and write a short recommendation here. (This class is worth ..... credit!)

*Adapted with permission of WYHS Therapy Dog Program*





**(High Schools Only!)**

**(Your School Name) Therapy Dog Program Waiver Example**

By signing this waiver, your student will have occasional access to spend approximately 15 minutes per session visiting our on-duty therapy dog

**DOUGLAS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT RE-1  
RELEASE, ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, AND ASSUMPTION OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

I/we understand that during my child's participation in the (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program, he/she may be exposed to risk of possible injury, which could be serious.

I/we understand, too, that it is not possible for Douglas County Schools, its employees or agents, to guarantee or otherwise assure the effectiveness of the safety measures or that the safety measures will be used in every instance. I further understand that mistakes, errors, or neglectful acts or omissions may happen and that equipment may fail. In addition, I/we assume the responsibility for safety in all activities.

I/we have accepted responsibility to verify with my physician that my child has no physical or psychological problems that would prohibit his/her participation in the (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program and agree to advise my child to comply with the instructions and directions of Douglas County School District staff members during the program and use of all equipment.

I/we (print parents' names) \_\_\_\_\_ in return for my child's opportunity to participate in (your school's name) do hereby exempt and release Douglas County Schools its directors, officers, employees, and agents from any and all liability, claims, demands, or actions whatsoever arising out of any damage, loss, or injury that my child or I/we might sustain while my child is participating in the (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program, whether or not such damage, loss or injury results from the negligence of Douglas County Schools, its directors, officers, employees, volunteers or agents or any defective equipment. I/we understand that if I/we do not sign this release, then my child will not be permitted to participate in the (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program. I/we hereby represent that I am/we are the parent(s)/guardians(s) of \_\_\_\_\_.

I/we further acknowledge that no representation or promises by Douglas County Schools representatives have been made to include me to sign this release.

Every individual participating in the (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program must carry health/accident insurance coverage. Douglas County Schools does not offer any medical/accident insurance to participating students, and makes no claim to do so.

I agree to follow all safety rules and teacher instructions at all times while participating in the (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program. I understand that failure to obey rules will result in my suspension from activities.



I/we hereby represent that I am/we are 18 years of age or older, and that I am/we are the parent(s)/guardian(s) of STUDENT'S FIRST AND LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_

By signing this waiver, your student will have occasional access to spend approximately 15 minutes per session visiting our on duty therapy dog. DOUGLAS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT RE – I RELEASE, ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, AND ASSUMPTION OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY I/we understand that during my child's participation in the (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program. He/she may be exposed to risk of possible injury, which could be serious. I/we understand, too, that it is not possible for Douglas County Schools, its employees or agents, to guarantee or otherwise assure the effectiveness of the safety measures or that the safety measures will be used in every instance. I further understand that mistakes, errors, or neglectful acts or omissions may happen and that equipment may fail. Also, I/we assume the responsibility for safety in all activities. I/we have accepted responsibility to verify with my physician that my child has no physical or psychological problems that would prohibit his/her participation in the (your schools's name) Therapy Dog Program and agree to advise my child to comply with the instructions and directions of Douglas County School District staff members during the program and use of all equipment. I/we in return for my child's opportunity to participate in (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program do hereby exempt and release the Douglas County Schools its directors, officers, employees, and agents from any and all liability, claims, demands or actions whatsoever arising out of any damage, loss or injury that my child or I/we might sustain while my child is participating in the (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program, whether or not such damage, loss or injury results from the negligence of Douglas County Schools, its directors, officers, employees, volunteers or agents or any defective equipment. I/we understand that if I/we do not sign this release, then my child will not be permitted to participate in the (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program. I/we hereby represent that I am/we are 18 years of age or older, and that I am/we are the parent(s) guardian(s) of the above acknowledged student(s). I/we further acknowledge that no representation or promises by Douglas County Schools representatives have been made to induce me to sign this release. Every individual participating in the (your school's name) Therapy Dog Program must carry health/accident insurance coverage. Douglas County Schools does not offer any medical/accident insurance to participating students, and makes no claim to do so.

**Parents Name and Date (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Adapted with Permission of MTHS Therapy Dog Program*