

Humane Society of Broward County
Animal Assisted Therapy



Event/Pet Therapy Visit Manual

2070 Griffin Road, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33328

humanebroward.com

Animal Assisted Therapy Program – Introduction

The Humane Society of Broward County (HSBC) firmly believes that animals have positive impacts on the lives of humans. It is this belief that has led to the inception of the Animal Assisted Therapy program (AAT).

Through this initiative, the Humane Society utilizes volunteers and their companion animals for AAT programs strictly as social therapy. The goal of this program was to reach the elderly residents of nursing homes in Broward County. The program has expanded to serve not only the elderly but to help the abused, neglected, physically challenged and mentally ill patients of all ages and genders.

We hope you are as excited as we are to have you join our program. In the interim, should you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact Katie Tutt, Animal Assisted Therapy Manager at ktutt@hsbroward.com or 954.266.6875.

Animal Assisted Therapy Program – Benefits

“Visiting Pets”, “Therapy Dogs” and “Pet Therapy” are just some names given to describe programs in which animals help people just by visiting them. An animal can offer entertainment or a welcome distraction from pain and infirmity. People often talk to the animals and share with them their thoughts, feelings and memories. Animal visits provide something to look forward to. The pet makes it easier for two strangers to talk. It gives people a common interest and provides a focus for conversation. An animal pays little attention to age or physical limitations, but accepts people as they are.

Animal Assisted Therapy programs have been proven to reduce stress and anxiety, reduce a person’s blood pressure and lower cholesterol. Petting encourages use of hands and arms, stretching and turning. There is a tremendous range of skills that can be taught using a therapy animal.

PET THERAPY GUIDELINES FOR EVENTS

The following guidelines are designed to ensure a safe and positive environment for pet therapy interactions.

Point of Contact

The event must assign a staff member or volunteer as the point of contact for HSBC therapy volunteers. This person will assist the therapy volunteers with navigating the event and address any needs or concerns that come up.

Volunteers should receive clear instructions on key logistics and expectations for the event, including designated areas for animal breaks, waste disposal, parking, and the sign-in process upon arrival.

Additionally, a staff member/volunteer must accompany AAT volunteers during an event. AAT volunteers are not permitted to be left alone with attendees, especially if the attendees are children.

Noise Levels

If the event has loud music playing, the pet therapy area must be set up away from the speakers. Preferably on the opposite side of the venue, a corridor, or an area where the volume of the music is diminished.

Facilitating Safe Visits

The facility or event staff should ensure safe visits for pet therapy volunteers and their animals by limiting the number of participants around them at any given time. Typically, 5-8 participants max per pet at any given time during the therapy visit is manageable. This helps maintain safety and reduces potential stress for the therapy animals.

If the event is at a school, students must be informed in advance about the proper way to interact with the therapy animals. This includes approaching the animals calmly and avoiding crowding them.

Location for therapy sessions/visits

The facility or event should have a location for therapy pet visits that is indoors or in a covered area to protect the animals from overheating in the sun.

If the temperature is over 79 degrees outside, the animals must be allowed to conduct therapy visits indoors.

There must be an approved area that the therapy animals can relieve themselves if necessary.

Animal Assisted Therapy Program – Infection Control

The proper selection and maintenance of the animals used in AAT programs is the first step toward the establishment of an appropriate infection control protocol. Age, health, cleanliness, and regular veterinary care of the animal are all important issues that need to be addressed to ensure a safe and successful program.

All animals used in our AAT program must be at least one year old to participate. Each animal certified with our AAT program must meet veterinary health requirements, receive a complete physical examination and receive all required Broward County vaccinations. Each animal participating in the AAT program must have a veterinarian certificate inclusive of proof of vaccinations and health status on file with us.

Hand washing is probably one of the most important methods of preventing the spread of infections, disease, or parasites. It is important for anyone who interacts with pets to wash their hands before and after visiting with the animals. It might be beneficial to have liquid hand sanitizer such as Purell available for staff, clients and volunteers to use.

It is equally important and the responsibility of the facility to be aware of those residents, clients, patients, staff members, etc. that are allergic to animals. Some people have reactions to the dander by touching an animal and others by inhaling it in the air. Many people with asthma are allergic to animal dander. Be sure that you know which residents, clients, patients, staff members, etc. at your facility might be allergic to animals and take proper precautions around those individuals.

It is imperative to alert the HSBC volunteer of any clients or patients that should not be visited due to potential contagion, autoimmune deficiencies, isolation orders, etc.