



# THE ALLIE PROJECT

Promoting the Educational Benefits of Therapy Dogs in Schools

## HELPFUL INFORMATION

### THE ADAI SCHOOL THERAPY DOG “DO AND DON’T” LIST

**1. *This is new to everybody.*** Mention the TD (*Therapy Dog*), is like a “new kid.” He is a little uneasy about what is expected of him right now. It will take a little time for him to get used to his new surroundings, his new routine, and all the new friends in his life. By the same token, it is important for kids to know ***even you*** don’t know exactly how things will work out. This is new to you too, remember. Let them know ***you are learning right along with TD and with the kids!*** (***GREAT time to tell them you’ve been doing your HOMEWORK, though!***)

**2. *Be sensitive to the TD’s feelings.*** It is important for everyone to know not to suddenly run toward the TD or crowd around her, or be real noisy around her. Be respectful. Walk quietly and talk quietly when approaching. For very young students, have a pre-determined and practiced “finger wag” or something like that to use when kids see the TD in the hallways. This will keep hallway noise and excitement to a minimum.

**3. *No one should bring the TD any toys or anything else without the handler’s approval.*** All the TD needs from the kids is LOVE, LOVE, LOVE. Goodness knows, he will give lots of love back to them UNCONDITIONALLY!

**4. *ANY food should be pre-approved only by the handler(s).*** If the TD ate treats all day long, he would have weight-related health problems in a hurry! ***Absolutely NO human food.*** The kids will understand this, especially the fact that YOU will be providing him any treats and that YOU will allow the kids, on occasion, to dole them out. Keep TD out of tempting “food situations,” such as the cafeteria.

**5. *Share how the TD had to go to school to become a school therapy dog.*** This is a wonderful illustration to help kids understand the importance of paying attention and doing the best they can at school.

**6. *Pay Attention to the Hygiene Scene.*** Brushing teeth, brushing hair, going to the vet/doctor, bathing, cleaning ears, are all so important! All of these necessities for good health can easily be used when relating things the TD needs to do with what the kids need to do, too. This is appropriate for any age!

**7. *Emphasize the TD is NOT a trick dog*** and doesn’t do the regular sort of tricks people often associate with dogs (*e.g., roll over and play dead, high five, speak, etc.*) He could learn those things, but it is not in his therapy dog “repertoire.” And they aren’t really necessary things for him to do. At some point (*maybe not at the first assembly, but rather, in smaller classroom sessions*), it is a WONDERFUL idea to explain the difference between therapy dogs and service dogs. As mentioned before, this is such a natural time to have kids truly understand how to approach service dogs and their people, what the law states about public access, and why the vest is used, especially when there is a service dog with someone in public.



**8. Nip in the bud any misconception the TD will stroll from classroom to classroom on her own.** Tell kids the TD will not be wandering the building, but will be with a trained adult handler at all times. ***This is such a great door-opener for developing good relationships between kids and adults***, but it cannot happen if an adult is not accompanying the dog (*not to mention a dog wandering the building by herself is detrimental to the educational process and actually could put the dog in danger*). ***Even if you allow a student to walk the dog, it is essential for an adult to be present.*** For example, a student could possibly misunderstand a dog's action and say the dog "bit" him or "growled" at him. If there is no adult supervision, the child could go home, tell his parents this, and put your whole program, as well as the whole ADAI School Therapy Dog Program, in jeopardy. ***An adult needs to be on the scene with the dog wherever the TD is!***

**9. Explain the difference between TD and a strange dog.** It is important to remember **EVERY** animal is an **ANIMAL** who communicates with us in a different manner. If the animal feels trapped or generally feels fearful, a dog or cat might react in a way that could be harmful to him and/or to his handler or owner. Even a family pet can turn on a child who doesn't understand how he might be upsetting or hurting the pet, however unintentional it might be. Everyone (*especially small children*) needs to understand their actions around a pet need to be gentle, soft, and non-threatening. Being proactive about teaching this concept is extremely important, not only for situations at school with a TD, but also for situations at home with family pets.

Again, do not think every dog will be patient and loving and calm like the TD is. Emphasize that no one will force a student to touch the TD if he or she doesn't want to do so. (*Some kids might be apprehensive at first.*)

**10. DO emphasize your TD belongs to EVERYONE at your school.** He is not your dog, but **THEIR** dog ... everyone's dog! ***This is a very important concept for everyone to understand (students, staff, administrators, parents alike).*** Have a card with the TD's picture on it to give to every student in your school, and be sure to have extras to share with new students each year or ones who come in during the year. If you like, you can even have the TD's birth date on it and other information. You would be amazed at how many parents will mention the TD's picture is on their fridge at home! If this is each child's dog, then each child should have his or her very own picture of the TD!

**11. Downtime for your TD is natural and perfectly okay.** Don't expect every moment to be filled with things for the dog to do or kids for the dog to visit. A dog bed is a normal thing for the handler to have nearby.

**12. Don't over plan activities for your TD to do or places for your TD to visit.** What your program will eventually look like will take time. Think of it as an ongoing process, and, by all means, ***be flexible about scheduling things for the TD to do.*** Having a rigid weekly classroom schedule for the dog is NOT necessarily the best plan simply because unexpected things come up. Make tentative plans for activities and then be flexible enough to change.

**13. Splurge and get yourself a good digital camera.** Take pictures all the time (*video too!*) of as many different kids and activities as possible. Pictures can be used to create cards for encouragement, for goal-oriented rewards, etc. Kids LOVE having their picture taken with the TD! So do adults! ***Better yet, have the kids make the videos! How cool would that be for the kids? Great project to teach story telling.***

Along these lines, keep a log of how you have specifically used your TD in your work with students, both intentionally and unintentionally. Pictures can tell or support a story, to be sure, but logs can give even more substance to your thoughts as to what worked well (*and what didn't*) as a practitioner. This is genuine, authentic working with students. Remember, some of these special moments you will want to record will not be planned. They will be "spontaneous" and may feel like "little miracles." (*Keep your Kleenex handy, too, because these moments will touch your heart.*) Additionally, keeping track of these moments also provides hard proof to those who might be skeptical, this program really works. This is not just "fluff" and parading around school with a dog on a string, it can truly change lives forever.

**14. Plan for time to meet with staff members to encourage the use of your TD in their curriculum areas.** While the TD is NOT at school primarily for use in the academic curriculum, he can certainly provide wonderful opportunities for teachers to accentuate, or liven up their subject matter for students. If you send something to staff members, do not assume they will read it. You may need to make personal contact with each of them on a regular basis to be sure they know you are listening to their ideas on how you can help their kids.

Enlist the aid of teachers in planning school-wide activities that could incorporate the TD (*Red Ribbon Week, Right to Read Week, Peace Day, etc.*). Ask them to come up with students' names for rewards, such as special reading time with their TD or a picture taken with their TD, for example. Having the staff understand the ways the TD can enrich the curriculum is essential. It is also essential they know how the TD can open doors of communication for all students and build a caring, comfortable, and trusting school climate.

**15. Do everything you can to make your TD visible around your school and community.** Your TD can greet kids in the morning as they enter the building, and can go to bus duty as they board buses to go home in the afternoon. Your TD can go to assemblies and even participate in them. He can wear costumes to celebrate various holidays and show school spirit. He can be in the "Santa Parade" or a similar community activity. The TD can have a place on your school website and bulletin boards throughout your school. He can even be part of a children's sermon at church! The possibilities are endless! Don't be shy! Call your local newspaper and radio and TV stations to report special activities involving your school's TD. Be shameless about spreading the good word about all the wonderful things a TD can provide for schools and at no cost to schools! People LOVE hearing good news for a change!

**16. Think of ideas to allow kids to learn about "giving back" to others** through simple fundraising ideas for **Assistance Dogs of America** or the local **Humane Society**. Have a Pet Wall of Fame for all students to put their pet pictures on a big wall at school and bring in quarters to add a picture to the wall. Or sponsor a "TD's Favorite Teacher" activity where kids bring in change to vote for who they think will be the TD's "favorite" at the end of the year, based on which teacher can coax their TD to them the fastest. Possibilities are endless in this realm, also. The idea here is to foster creative ways to give back to their community, to help kids learn that the world does not revolve around them alone.

**17. Never stop learning.** Attend any of the ADAI sponsored events you can, and certainly plan to attend summer ADAI workshops that involve networking with others in this rewarding field of school therapy dogs. The ideas shared are wonderful ones, and they always provide excitement and a positive "go for it" attitude for those who are there. Make a concerted effort to become truly involved in learning about the background not only of ADAI, but also of how this **School Therapy Dog Program** has evolved in this area.

Be willing to share your expertise, knowledge, and enthusiasm with anyone who asks! It's exciting stuff, and it is easy to see why the ADAI waiting list has grown so much! Who would have ever guessed this would have taken off so quickly? (*Even though putting kids and dogs together in schools truly IS a "no-brainer" when you think about interest and success!*) Learn all you can about the whole field of **Animal Assisted Therapy** and **Animal Assisted Activities**. Be willing to ask for help to do some research on how this is working in YOUR particular situation. Realize we have people on our ADAI team who are ready, willing, and wanting to help you do research!

**18. ADAI School Therapy Dogs belong to the school.** They are placed with COUNSELORS to be used in counseling situations and to open up communication with all students. Therefore, the TD's will work more in the counseling realm than anywhere else in the school. They are to be utilized in other areas of the curriculum, but their primary purpose is to be working with the counselors who are there for ALL students. This supports and lends credence to the fact that the dog belongs to everyone in the school, not just one person or one classroom.

**19.** Have a set of guidelines in place regarding other animals that might come into your building (*police dogs, show & tell pets, a visiting therapy dog, etc.*). Be proactive about this and also be firm about setting up the idea that the TD is the “top dog” in your school. Do not allow someone else to “come in and take over” because they have a nice, quiet dog that would work well in their own classroom. Other teachers will want to bring in their dogs to use in their classrooms. You need to squelch that whole idea immediately if you want to have the best School Therapy Dog Program possible. Enlist the aid of your administrators to establish and enforce these guidelines.

**20.** *Enlist other truly committed people to become trained as secondary handlers.* You will find you will be much, much, more successful if you have a team of people who can work together. From a practical point of view, too, it helps to have others who can serve as back up for the primary handler.

**21.** *PREPARE to have your whole life’s work changed from the moment you begin with your TD!*  
Enjoy every moment!

© 2015 Allie Project - All Rights Reserved