



THE ALLIE PROJECT

Promoting the Educational Benefits
of Therapy Dogs in Schools

HELPFUL INFORMATION

SUGGESTED STEPS TO ACQUIRING A SCHOOL THERAPY DOG

1. Research uses/benefits/concerns of having a full time therapy dog at school. Check the internet, books, organizations and/or people who have had experience.
2. Administrative support is essential. Discuss possibilities with building principals first. Go over your research and look at pros and cons, etc.
3. Decide who is responsible for the dog during non-school hours (at night, vacations, summertime, etc.). This should be one staff member, preferably a counselor or someone who has contact with ALL students. A teacher is okay, as long as he/she would relinquish the dog to a counselor or other handler during the school day. Otherwise, it would appear that the dog belongs just to one specific classroom, not the whole school.
4. Enlist the aid of at least one other staff member who would be willing to train as a handler with you and the dog. This allows more latitude for use of the therapy dog and also provides for support and sharing of the responsibility of caring for the dog.
5. Decide who will be responsible for veterinary care. Talk to local veterinarians and ask if they would be willing to give a discount on services. Some may even offer to provide routine care as a community service.
6. Educate your staff, including custodians, about the benefits of having a therapy dog at school daily. Give the staff ideas on incorporating the dog into lesson plans, activities, incentives, etc.
7. Apply for a school therapy dog (*for example, through an organization affiliated with Assistance Dogs International*). Please note that a full time school therapy dog in your building is completely different from having a visiting team of dog and handler to come in as a “Reader Dog,” for example. A full time therapy dog placed in a school setting allows for student ownership; this goes beyond petting and interacting with someone else’s dog.
8. Before the dog arrives at school, introduce the idea of a therapy dog to all your students, making sure that they know the dog belongs to ALL of them.
9. Plan to spend some team training time with your new dog before it comes into the daily school setting. This would probably be through the organization that provided the dog.



10. Be sure to find out if there are any students with allergies and how to keep any severe reactions from occurring (*keeping dog out of child's immediate area, having child not touch the dog, etc.*). This can be accomplished through a letter, with special instructions to be returned to the school, sent home to parents.
11. Enlist the aid of the media (newspaper, local radio, TV, etc.) to help provide information about the therapy dog and its use at school to your community. This can be a powerful PR tool for schools.
12. Introduce the dog to staff and students through assemblies and also individual classroom visits so that everyone knows ground rules about such things as not bringing treats, washing hands after petting, etc. Emphasize that EVERYONE needs to be aware of and sensitive to the feelings/emotions and physical needs of the dog (*being anxious in new situations, needing water and potty breaks, for example*).
13. Maintain close contact with the organization from which you received your dog so that if any problems or questions come up, they can be worked out together.
14. Maintain communication within your building to assure that the dog is continuing to be used to the utmost effectiveness throughout the entire year.
15. Be creative in finding ways to use the dog with students. Offer specific activities, stories, and other classroom opportunities for specific dates/times. Teachers are very busy with day-to-day planning and teaching. While they will not often come to you with ideas, they will be more likely to sign up for pre-planned activities.
16. Plan to take your dog to nursing homes, summer school sessions, libraries, etc. during the summer several times to practice skills used at school and to extend community awareness and exposure.
17. Enjoy the wonderful experience of watching your students grow socially, emotionally, and academically throughout the whole school year!

Created by Shelley Wanner and Jackie Boyd • © 2015 Allie Project - All Rights Reserved

