

ANIMAL COMPANIONS TEAM ASSESSMENT

Introduction

Thank you for your application to become one of our visiting teams. By joining Animal Companions you will have the opportunity to form friendships, share affection and bring pleasure to many.

Animal Companions firmly believes that animals deserve to be treated with respect and kindness, and we therefore actively promote positive, reward-based methods of training. We do not condone any form of aversive or punishment-based methods to teach our dogs. Rather, we encourage you to use praise, pats, toys, and food treats as rewards for your dog.

Assessment

To maintain and guard our reputation, the Animal Companions' Assessment follows established guidelines that will ensure all our accredited teams meet the highest standards. As ambassadors for our organisation, volunteer teams represent Animal Companions in hospitals, nursing homes, special needs facilities, schools, and at public events. Accredited dogs are expected to display sound temperament and respond calmly in a range of situations. Accredited handlers will be required to communicate courteously and sensitively with a wide range of people, including those with disabilities.

Animal Companions Assessors are experienced dog trainers who have a sound knowledge of canine behaviour and body language, and have your dog's best interests as their priority.

The assessment covers four key areas, as follows:

- 1. Handler/Dog relationship (handler's awareness and understanding of their dog)**
- 2. Presentation of the dog (cleanliness, grooming, nails, etc.)**
- 3. Basic obedience skills and good manners**
- 4. Temperament and stability in unusual and unknown situations.**

Please DO NOT bring your dog to be assessed if it is:

1. Under 18 months of age
2. A female dog in season, due to come into season, or pregnant
3. Showing signs of illness or discomfort
4. Infested with parasites or showing signs of any other contagious/infectious condition
5. Trained as an attack or guard dog
6. You have owned the dog for less than six months.

Should the Assessor believe your dog exhibits any of the above conditions, you may be asked to postpone your assessment.

What you should bring with you on assessment day

- Your dog - on a flat collar & lead (no correction collars, head collars or harnesses, please)
- Current Vet certificate confirming a clean bill of health for each dog assessed
- Current Vaccination Certificate
- Food treats or other rewards
- Plastic bag to pick up after your dog
- Proof of your identification e.g. driver's license or other photo ID

What if we are declined?

Occasionally Assessors may decline to accredit a team, for example, if they feel the dog is uncomfortable or showing signs of anxiety during the assessment process. Please do not be disheartened if this happens to you. Perhaps your dog is a wonderful pet but is not quite suitable for this program. It may just be a case of spending some more time re-training your dog and then re-assessing it. Your Assessor will be happy to discuss the reasons for their decision. However, please be aware the Assessor's decision is final.

ANIMAL COMPANIONS ASSESSMENT

Handler & Dog Relationship

Good Manners, Temperament & Behaviour

Throughout the following exercises you are encouraged to offer reassurance and encouragement to your dog. You are welcome to use food treats or other rewards.

1. Meet a stranger & sit politely to be petted - ON LEAD

- An unknown person is able to approach you and your dog, shake your hand and touch your shoulder without any adverse reaction from your dog.
- Your dog accepts being petted by a stranger.

2. Controlled walk - ON LEAD

- Your dog is happy to walk beside you on a loose lead (either left or right side).
- Your dog willingly sits or drops on command.

3. Controlled walk - OFF LEAD

- Your dog is happy to walk beside you in a relaxed manner when it is off the lead.

4. Acceptance of un-coordinated petting - ON LEAD

- Your dog is relaxed and appears comfortable being petted in an un-coordinated and/or unpredictable way.

(Some clients may not have 100% control of their motor skills. Your dog must be comfortable with unusual/unpredictable movements from these clients).

5. Short sit stay - MAY BE ON OR OFF LEAD

- Your dog is comfortable remaining in a sit position while you walk a short distance away.

6. Recall - OFF LEAD

- Your dog comes willingly to you when called and allows the lead to be put back on.

7. Acceptance of another dog - ON LEAD

- Your dog displays tolerance towards another dog close by, and remains under your control.

8. Restraining hug & front paws lifted off the ground - ON LEAD

- Your dog accepts an unknown person hugging it around the body, and possibly lifting its front paws off the ground.

(You may encounter some over-enthusiastic clients who may not understand a dog's natural reluctance to be held in this manner).

9. Unstable posture in an unknown person - ON LEAD

- Your dog maintains a relaxed, happy, confident manner when approached by a stranger with unstable posture. The person may be using a walking stick, walking frame, crutches or be in a wheelchair.

(Many aged clients require the use of walking aids, so a dog must be confident around such equipment).

10. Walking through a peaceful crowd - ON LEAD

- Your dog is relaxed and comfortable walking amongst a group of people talking quietly, and does not display any signs of undue stress and anxiety at being surrounded by strangers.

11. Acceptance of group petting - ON LEAD

- Your dog is relaxed and comfortable around a group of people all vying to get its attention & touch it.

(Children especially are eager to meet your dog and may rush simultaneously without realising that this can cause concern to a dog).

12. Walking through a noisy crowd - ON LEAD

- Your dog is relaxed and comfortable walking amongst a noisy group of people, and does not display any signs of anxiety or aggression to either the humans or loud noises (loud voices, laughing, etc.) An object will be dropped unexpectedly to create a loud clanging noise.

13. Angry shouting and gesturing - ON LEAD

- Your dog may show an interest in two people who are arguing and shouting at each other, but under no circumstances display aggressive, protective behaviour.

(You may encounter clients who do not understand that a dog may perceive shouting as a threat).

14. Acceptance of a gentle bump to the body from behind - ON LEAD

- Your dog does not react aggressively or in an anti-social way when it receives an unexpected bump to its body.

(Some clients may be unsteady on their feet and accidentally knock a dog).

15. Acceptance of a treat from a stranger - ON LEAD

- Your dog displays good manners and accepts a treat in a well-mannered way.