

BUCHANAN COUNTY UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI EXTENSION

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TEAM GUIDELINES

Pony Express Therapy Dogs strive to assist every registered and probationary team to become successful in their interactions while representing the organization in official activities.

General requirements:

1. This is a commitment.
2. The handler must be in possession of the dog for a minimum of three months. All dogs must be at least one year old and must be transported to and from visits inside a vehicle.
3. Dogs must always be on a leash.
4. Every person who expects to take their dog on a visit must pass the Pony Express Therapy Dogs evaluation with their dog. Dog/handler are Registered as a “team”.
5. In order to take the evaluation, you must either be at least 18 years old, or be at least 14 and have an approved adult over the age of 18 with you during the exam. Anyone under 18 will be required to have the same approved adult over the age of 18 with them on each visit. The dog, under 18 handler and approved adult constitute the “team” for these visits.
6. To participate in the Pony Express Therapy Dogs program, you must pass the evaluation and successfully complete the probationary period.
7. A Therapy Pack is required to include: Pony Express Therapy Dogs ID (to be worn), copy of health record, Incident Report form, disposable bag, paper towel and sanitary wipes. Copy of the Photo Release is recommended.
8. Annual dues for all members (handlers) are assessed as follows: 1st year – cost of the purchase of a Pony Express Therapy Dogs’ approved dog therapy vest, including embroidery; 2nd and subsequent years - \$20, due and payable on August 1st of each year. Dues will be prorated for members joining during the year: November – February \$15; March – June \$10. *Special exception:* if a non-registered member pays dues and then gets registered and purchases the required vest, a prorated refund will be made pursuant to the schedule set forth above.
9. Use of the Pony Express logo in any manner is only allowed at sanctioned Pony Express Therapy visits or special events.

Before the evaluation:

1. Your dog should have obedience training. The AKC Canine Good Citizen (CGC) is an option that can be obtained with completion of all of the CGC requirements.

2. Supply executed Health Record to Pony Express Therapy Dogs prior to the evaluation. This form provides veterinarian certification of proof of rabies, distemper, Bordetella vaccination and a clear fecal report.
3. Attend the orientation session for new members (without dogs).
4. Make sure your dog is well groomed and free of fleas, ticks and other pests.

Equipment:

1. Pony Express Therapy Dogs **DOES NOT** permit the following leashes or collars:

LEASHES:

- Retractable leads/leashes
- Leashes longer than 6'
- Elastic or bungee leashes
- Chain/metal leashes
- Slip leads/leashes

COLLARS:

- Pinch, prong or spiked collars
 - Chain/metal collars
 - Electronic collars
 - Full slip collars [*modified slip, known as Martingale, are allowed*]
2. Strollers are allowed for small dogs as long as they are specifically designed for use by dogs.

Evaluation:

- Teams need to pass each item on the evaluation, unless marked as optional.
 - Evaluation items may be given in any order.
 - A CGC can be earned by completing all of the evaluation items, including the “down” and “20 foot” option.
 - No treats will be given during the exam.
 - Handlers are encouraged to praise their dogs throughout the exam and may give leash and verbal corrections.
 - Dogs must be on a leash at all times.
 - Any dog that eliminates during the evaluation will fail.
1. **Examine therapy pack and fill out top of evaluation form:** Handler will fill out top of evaluation form while therapy pack is examined. A Therapy Pack is required to include: Pony Express Therapy Dogs ID (to be worn), copy of health record, Incident Report form, disposable bag, paper towel and sanitary wipes. You may have other items in addition to the required items.
 2. **Come in through a controlled entry:** The dog and handler approach a doorway. Handler will make the dog wait and then enter. The dog should not jump, pull or bolt through the entry.
 3. **Accepting a friendly stranger:** dog will be petted/hugged and given a brief exam and demonstrate “sit” and “down” [*down is an OPTION for CGC*]. The vet or a representative of Pony Express Therapy Dogs will pet and give the dog a brief exam by examining various parts of their body (i.e.

ears, paws, brushing, etc.). Dogs should remain calm and allow the exam to take place without a great deal of struggle. At some point the handler will be asked to demonstrate that their dog can sit and down [*down is an OPTION for CGC*].

4. **Appearance and grooming:** Dogs must be clean and pest free.
5. **Dogs will walk to the side of their handler:** (in control, not pulling or lagging, i.e. loose lead) and show change of direction and pace. Dogs should be in control at the side of the handler. Dogs should not lunge or get ahead of the handler, and they also should not lag behind. Dog will demonstrate change of direction by a right turn, left and an about turn with at least one stop in between and another at the end.
6. **Tolerates raised voices, being petted by several at once and walking through a milling crowd:** a group of volunteers will surround the team and will pet the dog. They will also praise the dog and at least one will raise their voice. Dog must remain calm and should not either be overly excited or too shy.
7. **Demonstrate dog can stay (either sit or down) from a distance of 20 feet:** The handler chooses the position for leaving the dog in the stay. The dog's leash is replaced with a line 20 feet long. When instructed by the evaluator, the handler tells the dog to stay and walks forward the length of the line, turns and returns to the dog at a natural pace. The dog must remain in the place in which it was left (it may change position) until the evaluator instructs the handler to release the dog. The dog may be released from the front or the side. [*20 ft. is OPTION for CGC; 10 ft. is required*]
8. **Demonstrate "come" from a distance of 10 feet:** The handler will put the dog in a stay. The handler will then walk 10 feet in front of their dog and call the dog using their "come" command. The dog should not go to the handler until called and without wondering off.
9. **Meet and greet people with neutral dog(s):** Two handlers and dogs approach each other from a distance of about 20 feet, stop, shake hands and exchange pleasantries and continue on for 10 feet. Dogs will remain at the side of the handler and should not growl (or other aggressive behaviors), bark, attempt to lunge or jump up.
10. **Reaction to a distraction:** This demonstrates that the dog is confident at all times when faced with common distracting situations. The evaluator will select and present two distractions, i.e. unsteady person, staggering or gesturing, someone in a wheelchair, or dropping a crutch or cane Person will approach dog with a walker and will appear to be unsteady. Dog will remain calm and must not jump up on the volunteer.
11. **Dog will be separated from handler for three minutes to show control during separation:** Handler will leave the dog with the evaluator and will go out of sight. Dog may be somewhat anxious, but will remain under control without constant whining, barking etc. Following a period of three (3) minutes the handler will be called back.
12. **Dogs will pass by treats to demonstrate they can "leave it":** Treats will either be in a bowl or on the floor and the handler will give the "leave it" command as they pass by. Dogs may express interest but should not get any of the treats. The dog does not have to stop at the treats.
13. **Dog will remain under control throughout the evaluation:** Dog will follow commands given and will behave in a controlled manner.
14. Handlers who pass will be asked to fill out paperwork before they leave.

Probationary period: after passing the evaluation

1. The Probationary period is an opportunity for Facility Coordinators to assist in the growth and development of the probationary teams and their success.
2. An Active Probationary Team is a handler/dog team that adheres to all of the requirements of the Pony Express Therapy Dogs program, but who has not yet graduated
3. New teams will be on probation for a minimum of 3 months. During probation, the team will need to make 2 visits each month (total of 6). If it is decided by the Executive Committee that a new team needs additional work, the probationary period may be extended.
4. New teams are required to participate in a variety of facilities, which allows interaction with different therapy teams and types of visits.
5. A registered therapy team shall always be present at probationary visits. It is the Facility Coordinator's responsibility to make sure there is a registered team with any probationary team.
6. The Facility Coordinator shall provide the handler feedback immediately upon completion of a visit.
7. After successful completion of the probationary period, a new team will graduate and participate in the program as a registered team.

Scheduling Visits:

1. Each registered handler must have an individual account on the on-line calendar to schedule visits.
2. A "visit" (with a handler and dog) is the event identified on the calendar, i.e. date, length of time, location.
3. Each visit identifies the number of "slots" (teams) required for the visit. When appropriate, the slots are separated between "probationary" and "registered".
4. A "joint visit" is by two registered handlers with one dog. Each handler is registered as a team with that dog. A joint visit does meet the requirement of two sets of eyes. The joint visit is signed up on the calendar as a visit for one of the teams, with a note that the other handler is also present and may be handling the dog. A joint visit is only allowed for a new team in the third or final month of probation.
5. Visits should be scheduled using the on-line calendar, which is coordinated by the Pony Express Therapy Dogs' Secretary.
6. The Facility Coordinator(s) for each site is identified on the calendar, with contact information. The Facility Coordinator is responsible to: coordinates visits, report the teams who attended to the Secretary (if different than the calendar), and handle any issues that may come up at the visit.
7. It is the handlers' responsibility to contact the Facility Coordinator ahead of time if you cannot make a scheduled visit and update the on-line calendar, if applicable.

Conduct at Visits:

1. Only registered Pony Express Therapy teams are allowed at visits. No visitors or non-Pony Express members are allowed. Exceptions may be reviewed by the Executive Committee on a case by case basis.
2. Personal business of any kind cannot be promoted during any Pony Express Therapy program visit or special event.
3. A visit starts as soon as you get out of your car and ends when you get back in your car.

4. Handlers must wear the Pony Express Therapy Dogs badge on each visit and have their therapy pack with them.
5. A Therapy Pack is required to include: Pony Express Therapy Dogs badge visible (worn around your neck), copy of health record, Incident Report form, disposable bag, paper towel and sanitary wipes.
6. Dogs must wear either the scarf (during probation) or the cape (after graduating) during each visit.
7. Dogs are expected to be clean, groomed and pest free on each visit.
8. Licking is to be discouraged for health reasons.
9. Dogs must be on a leash at all times.
10. No treats/water are allowed during a visit. Treats/water should be provided to your dog outside of the facility. Treats during a visit may be disruptive to other therapy teams. (*be considerate of others*)
11. Handlers should be clean, well-groomed and sensibly dressed. Clothes should be clean, not torn or ripped, and no obscene logos or designs. For safety reasons, handlers must wear ankle length pants and closed toe shoes.
12. Two sets of eyes required on each visit. At the very minimum this means two members and one dog. The Executive Committee, for special events, presentations or other non-standard visits, may grant an exception to this.
13. Teams should be at the visits 5-10 minutes before each visit to allow the dogs time to socialize.
14. Any incident during a visit must be immediately reported and Incident Report procedures followed.
15. A Photo Release Waiver must be obtained from a parent/guardian/person if any photograph is taken at a visit showing a person with the dog. See specific Guidelines under Photo Release.
16. If a visit is “officially called” by the Facility Coordinator for weather, illness at the facility or any other situation beyond the team’s control, the visit will still count.
17. If your dog is agitated or stressed for any reason during a visit, you should remove your dog and try to refocus them – then return to the visit. If that did not clear up the behavior, you should notify the Facility Coordinator and leave the visit. Remember – you are always an advocate for your dog!!

Special Visit Requirements:

BOOK BUDDIES: The Book Buddies reading program consists of two separate sections: the library and schools. **THESE VISITS ARE NOT APPROPRIATE FOR PROBATIONARY TEAMS.**

To participate in the Book Buddies **LIBRARY** program, the registered team needs to:

1. Attend an East Hills Library visit as a greeter;
2. Attend two additional East Hills Library visits as a reading team;
3. Receive approval from the program’s Facility Coordinator team (*coordinator, plus existing Book Buddies*)
4. The LIBRARY visits are signed up on the calendar on a monthly basis.

To participate in the Book Buddies **SCHOOL** program, the registered team needs to:

1. Complete requirements of the Library program;

2. Attend brief training* and sign confidentiality agreement;
3. The SCHOOL program is a commitment that is made for the entire school year.

** This training may be waived if the handler was a part of a previously approved Book Buddies team in good standing*

HOSPICE: All hospice visits are coordinated through the Mosaic Hospice office. Any team wanting to participate in hospice has to go through the Mosaic hospice training program. If interested, the program's Facility Coordinator will provide the information. **THIS VISIT IS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR PROBATIONARY TEAMS.**

An exception to the "two eyes" policy can be granted if the following requirements are met:

- Must have two years hospice visit experience with another hospice-trained member before going on your own;
- After two years, request for exception can be made; and
- Current hospice-trained members in good standing are grandfathered

PRAYER BUDDIES: The Prayer Buddies program is a specialty program and not available to probationary teams. Special approval is required for any Prayer Buddies event.

Facility Coordinator Responsibilities:

1. The Facility Coordinator should be a handler in good standing that has been in the program for at least one year.
2. The Facility Coordinator shall be responsible for the scheduling of their facility visits.
3. The Facility Coordinator shall monitor the calendar and verify there are sufficient teams signed up to allow the visit to occur, including presence of a registered team with any probationary team to allow one-on-one mentoring.
4. If there are not sufficient teams, the Facility Coordinator shall contact teams to fill required spots.
5. The Facility Coordinator shall closely monitor on-going visits and adjust visits as necessary.
6. The Facility Coordinator shall provide the probationary handler feedback immediately upon completion of a visit.
7. If there is an incident at a visit, the Facility Coordinator shall prepare the necessary Incident Report procedures.
8. The Facility Coordinator shall discuss any inappropriate behavior with a handler upon completion of the visit.
9. If a visit does not have required Teams, or is required to be cancelled for other reasons, the Facility Coordinator shall be responsible for contacting the teams signed up, facility and notify the Secretary to update the calendar.
10. The Facility Coordinator shall contact the facility's contact every six months (July and January) and update any applicable information.

Photo Release:

1. Any photograph taken during a visit that includes any non-Pony Express member (*i.e. child at the library, parent, patient at a nursing home, etc.*), the approved Pony Express Therapy Dogs Photo Release Waiver must be signed by the parent/guardian or adult individual themselves.

2. The use of the photograph is solely for use by the Pony Express Therapy Dog program (through the Buchanan County University of Missouri Extension Office) for display of such photographs in presentations, publications, websites, social media and any other means. The photograph should not be used for personal use.
3. The photograph and Waiver should be provided to the Facility Coordinator and a copy to the Secretary for the files.

Incident Report:

1. If an incident occurs at any visit:
 - It should be reported to the Facility Coordinator immediately;
 - A Pony Express Therapy Dogs' Incident Report form shall be immediately prepared by the Facility Coordinator and one other Pony Express member; and
 - The Incident Report should be submitted to the Executive Committee within twelve (12) hours of the incident.
2. The team involved and any witnesses should assist in preparation of the Incident Report.
3. The Executive Committee shall immediately notify the Extension Office and provide a copy of the Incident Report, as well as a copy to the facility.
4. The Executive Committee shall review the Incident Report and take necessary action.

Maintaining your membership:

1. **Membership in the Pony Express Therapy Dogs is a privilege, not a right.**
2. Active Probationary Team: See Probation related sections above.
3. Non-Registered Member: is a member who does not currently have a dog, but anticipates becoming a Registered Team in the future. This member will actively participate in the program assisting in events.
4. A Registered Teams is required to make at least one visit a month. Sign up for the visits are done in advance on the on-line calendar. If the team is not able to attend a visit, the Facility Coordinator should be notified immediately. The contact information is on the calendar. The calendar must also be updated to correctly reflect the visit.
5. Any incident of aggression by a dog during a visit will be grounds for immediate removal from the program.
6. Any serious or repetitive incidents by a team may be subject to suspension or termination, subject to review by the Executive Committee as set out below.
7. Vaccination records must be kept current and on file with the Executive Committee's Secretary. If updated records are not provided by the due date, a reminder will be sent. The reminder will indicate that the vaccinations are overdue and, if not received, within thirty (30) days, the team will be suspended from visits until the vaccinations are updated and the information provided.
8. A Registered Team will be re-registered every two years. This will consist of passing the same evaluation that new members take and providing the required Health Record.
9. If any team cannot participate in the program for a period of time because of illness, out of town, etc., a written request shall be made to the Executive Committee prior to the anticipate leave requesting their participation be put on HOLD for a specific period of time. The Executive Committee will review and provide a written reply.

10. Any probationary team who has been on HOLD for a period of time, shall attend one visit without a dog prior to starting back into the program.
11. Any Registered Team who has not attended any visits during a three month period, must retest at the next scheduled evaluation to continue their registration.
12. Any violation of the Pony Express Therapy Dog requirements may result in the Executive Committee imposing a suspension of the team.
13. Procedures are established for Members who are not meeting their obligations: the Executive Director will make personal contact to discuss the situation; an email/letter will then be sent from the Executive Committee to address the non-compliance issues and what needs to be done; an optional meeting can be scheduled with the Executive Committee to discuss; and, if appropriate, dismissal from the program.
14. The Executive Committee of Pony Express Therapy Dogs will address any issues with teams that may come up through complaints of other members, facilities or other incidents. The Executive Committee of Pony Express Therapy Dogs reserves the right to deny, revoke or not renew any team membership. The Executive Committee of Pony Express Therapy Dogs will work with teams to try and correct/resolve issues. In certain cases, it may require that a team withdraw from the program.
15. The Pony Express Therapy Dogs Executive Committee reserves the right to grant exceptions to any requirement or regulation upon a majority vote of the Executive Committee.
16. The Pony Express Therapy Dogs Executive Committee has the ability to amend these Guidelines as may become necessary and provide notification to all members at that time.

Aggression Policy:

Pony Express Therapy Dogs will not tolerate aggressive behavior being exhibited by any of our dogs. Such behavior is a potential threat to the people we visit, ourselves, our dogs and to the entire organization. Dogs that exhibit aggressive behavior, biting, snapping, snarling, aggressive lunging, growling, etc. will not be tolerated.

Any aggressive behavior directed at a person or dog by a current Pony Express Therapy Dogs team (either registered or probationary) when participating in a Pony Express event may result in the immediate dismissal of that team from the program. Any type of aggressive behavior of a dog shall be reported to an Executive Committee member immediately. The Executive Committee will evaluate the situation and will take appropriate action, which may include the immediate surrendering of the team's cape.

Awards Program:

Pony Express Therapy Dogs is proud to have a program to reward the number of visits made by a dog. The visits are acknowledged at the following levels: 25, 50, 100, 200, 300, 400 and more if appropriate. The award is identified by an embroidered star on the dog's cape/vest with the number of visits. The procedure to obtain an award is:

- Handler will email the calendar coordinator to request a count of the dog's visits;
- The calendar coordinator will notify the handler of the count;
- Depending on the number of visits, the handler will receive a Certificate with the approved number of approved visits.

- The handler (at their own cost) will take the Certificate to Sports Page in Savannah (*Pony Express approved embroiderer*) to have them put the star(s) on the vest. [*i.e. if someone has 100 visits, they can have three stars – 25, 50, 100; or just one for 100. That is up to the handler.*]

Removal from the program:

If a dog or team is in any violation of the policies and Guidelines of the program stated above, they may be suspended or removed immediately from the program.

FAILURE TO FOLLOW GUIDELINES:

1. If an alleged violation (failure to follow Pony Express Guidelines) is brought to the attention of the Executive Committee, the Committee shall determine if there is a violation and requires further action.
2. The Executive Director shall contact the handler subject to the violation and get their opinion of the incident.
3. A written report will be presented to the Executive Committee, with a copy to the handler.
4. Repeated violations of the Guidelines are serious. Depending on the violation and frequency, the Executive Committee may decide to take further action, i.e. suspension or removal.
5. Discussion about any team violations shall be handled in a “closed session” of the Executive Committee.
6. Minutes from a meeting discussing the alleged violation should reference “discussion of alleged violation of the Guidelines” and all facts and discussion from the Closed Session be kept confidential.
7. A separate, confidential summary of the Closed Session shall be prepared for the Executive Committee only and kept by the Secretary.

AGGRESSION:

1. Upon an issue of aggression, the team shall immediately be removed from the program.
2. The team shall turn in their cape immediately to the Facility Coordinator and leave the facility.
3. The team shall work with the Facility Coordinator on preparing the Incident report.
4. The team shall be refunded for the difference between the cost of their cape and the dues.
5. No team removed for an incident of aggression shall be allowed back in the program.

RETIREMENT:

1. If a team decides to retire their dog from the program, they must provide written notice to the Executive Committee. As of the date of that notification, the team shall no longer make any visits as a Pony Express Therapy Dog.
2. The handler can remain a member of the organization by paying regular annual dues.
3. The cape for a retiring dog does not need to be returned. It can be kept by the handler but cannot be used on any other dog until they have passed the evaluation and graduated into the Pony Express Therapy Dogs program.