

C.A.T. DOG TEMPERAMENT AND TEAM EVALUATION

The C.A.T. Dog Team evaluation process assesses the dog's temperament and animal/handler skills as a team. This allows handlers to demonstrate how well they interpret and manage their canine's behavior and how well their canine responds to them as a handler. Only a Certified C.A.T. Evaluator may conduct each aspect of the testing procedure. Each C.A.T. Dog Team (animal/handler) must demonstrate focus and maintain control using basic commands with mild through advanced level distractions present. The purpose of this process is to demonstrate realistic scenarios and identify possible reactions a C.A.T. Dog Team may encounter in a therapy dog's working environment. The C.A.T. Dog Team Leaders (human handlers) will also be assessed on how they interact with the evaluator and the evaluator's assistants, along with employees/staff, members/patients and all elements of the facility.

C.A.T. Dog Teams working with children and/or special needs individuals will need to do so with no on-the-job corrections.

To uphold our ability to offer the highest level of quality caring and maximize safety while interacting with children and/or special needs individuals, additional testing and screening is required. We must all remember that as a C.A.T. Dog Team Leader it is YOUR first responsibility to trust your dog for information in every moment. A past experience is never a guarantee for any future outcome. EVERY DOG is capable of biting! "This is the first time" just means they have never shown or exhibited this behavior before to us, not that any dog should ever be considered incapable of biting. It is in their nature as animals. Even as humans, not all adults are willing to tolerate children for very long periods of time, neither will many dogs. This is cause for concern as children can become subject to unforeseen injury while interacting with dogs more than adults. Children often move around differently, become suddenly excitable and have higher-pitched voices, ALL in which any one of these things can trigger a dog's internal state of arousal to increase. Children can be unpredictable by nature and known to jump up/down, crawl under tables and frolic around such as "wounded prey" is enticing to a dog along with many other things that could trigger and out of the ordinary reaction in even your own dog. Handlers sometimes push dogs that would rather avoid children to unwittingly be in their presence. Even a dog that is hyper or exuberantly happy can knock over a child or scratch them mistakenly.

PLEASE NOTE: We will only pass a dog that is comfortable providing comfort to others.
We firmly believe that a dog should not be put into an uncomfortable situation,
... even for his/her owner's sake!

Dog Requirements

Owners must show proof of good health from their veterinarian and proof that all vaccines are up to date. All dogs are required to have passed the American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen testing within the last two years prior to taking the C.A.T. test.

Handler Equipment

All tests must be performed on 4 or 6ft. non-retractable leash. Dogs should have well-fitting buckle collars made of leather or fabric. Special training collars such as pinch collars, head halters, etc. are not permitted at any time. The owner/handler can bring the dog's brush or comb to the test as well as a few appropriate treats for their dog.

Evaluation Equipment

Individuals with certain conditions such as having suffered a stroke, Down Syndrome, etc., may not appear "normal" to a dog. There are also situations that the patient may be wearing a protective mask and/or gloves during the interaction. The use of special equipment will help to determine if your dog is sensitive to these issues. Evaluators performing the testing may be wearing Halloween masks, surgical masks and/or hats, sunglasses, etc. In addition, the evaluator will pet the dog while wearing surgical gloves.

Encouragement

Owners/handlers may use praise and encouragement throughout the test. The owner may pet the dog between exercises.

Failures – Dismissals

Any dog that eliminates during testing must be marked failed. Any dog that growls, snaps, bites, attacks, or attempts to attack a person or another dog must be dismissed from the test immediately.

Exceptions

Exceptions to the testing requirements are only for dogs that have an injury or disability, which prevents them from physically performing the requirement. This would include items such as loss of limb, physical abnormalities, etc.

Evaluation / Trial Period

Within 30 days of passing the evaluation, dogs and their handlers will be required to visit a facility with a C.A.T. Evaluator. The dog and handler will be required to make at least two unaccompanied visits to their assigned facility; this must be done within 30 days of your passing test date. A C.A.T. Evaluator will accompany the team again on the fourth visit to the facility.

If at any time the dog exhibits aggressive behavior, signs that it is not comfortable doing the work, shows signs of stress that are due to the performance of pet therapy, or the volunteer or team does not follow the policies and procedures of C.A.T. or the facility, C.A.T. reserves the right to remove the team from service.

Part I: Improper Greeting, “Rude Petting” and “Rude Behavior”

Exercise 1: This exercise demonstrates that the dog will not become “protective” in the event that someone approaches and makes physical contact with the handler. The evaluator will walk up to the handler, shake hands and “hug” the handler. The evaluator will also approach the handler quickly with open arms to “hug” the handler.

Acceptable reaction: dog steps aside; shows that it is uncomfortable but does not show any type of aggression.

Unacceptable reaction: dog lunges; barks; snaps at, or shows any type of aggression.

Exercise 2: This exercise demonstrates that the dog will tolerate uncomfortable types of petting. Begin with the dog sitting or standing at the handler's side, the evaluator then “pats” the dog on the top of the head and proceeds to roughly pat the body. The evaluator will engage in exuberant, sudden or clumsy petting. This will include examining the dog's tail and ears and recording the reaction. The dog must not show resentment or timidity. The dog's paw will be held for about five seconds.

Acceptable reaction: calm, relaxed; licks your hand; “shakes” your hand.

Questionable reactions: pulls foot and whines.

Unacceptable reaction: mouths your hand; snarls; growls, snaps; whines, tries to escape; submissively urinates.

Exercise 3: While playing with the dog, the evaluator will briefly pinch the webbing between his or her toes. The evaluator will tug at the dog's hair. The tail will be lifted and manually wagged.

Acceptable reaction: tries to pull away, but shows forgiveness; yelps but is not aggressive; trusts the evaluator and allows further petting.

Unacceptable reaction: growls; snaps; acts fearful or distrustful.

Exercise 4: The evaluator and at least one other person will pet and play with the dog while backing it into a corner. The dog can show no aggression or panic.

Part II: Response to Basic Commands and Taking a Treat

Exercise 1: This exercise will demonstrate the comfort level of the dog and handler with each other and how well the dog responds to the handler's commands. Traffic cones will be placed about. Each of these cones will include a sign that requests you and your dog to perform a specific command or task such as asking your dog to sit or down. The team will be asked to walk through the cones on a loose leash, and perform each of the commands. The team will be presented with an unexpected distraction that the team will need to react to.

Acceptable: Dog walks well on a loose leash. Dog performs commands after only one or two requests from the handler. Team shows that they are “in tune” with each other and are able to deal with distractions as they arise.

Unacceptable: Dog pulls on the leash. Handler must repeat the command more than three (3) times. Handler uses any kind of force to get the dog to perform the command. Handler does not have control of the dog and the dog does not recoup from the distraction.

Exercise 2: This exercise demonstrates that the dog is capable of taking a treat gently from the hand of someone other than the owner. The evaluator will offer a high value treat to the dog with an outstretched hand, the food in an upturned palm with the fingers open. If possible, a second individual that the dog is not familiar with will do the next treat test. A treat will be offered with the treat between the thumb and forefingers. The dog must demonstrate control in taking a treat and should not take it with too much exuberance. The dog's teeth should not contact the person's hand.

Part III: A “Working Dog's” Approach to Meeting Other Dogs

Exercise 1: This exercise demonstrates that the dog will display and maintain polite behaviors while “working” with or around other dogs. The handler/Team Leader's responsibilities will be to encourage and maintain guidance towards proper behavior and removal

from the environment for improper greetings/behavior displays. Good behavior begins with good leadership. Two handlers and their dogs directly approach each other from a distance. Immediately stop, with dogs seated calmly by their side. Humans shake hands while exchanging pleasantries, and remain in place for up to 15 seconds ignoring the dogs. The dogs may show no more than casual interest in each other. Neither dog should forge forward nor drag its handler towards the other dog, jump on the other dog or its handler. This is a working environment and not the time for dog-on-dog play.

Acceptable reaction: slight curiosity and sniffing, is okay.

Unacceptable reaction: any dominant, overly excited or aggressive reactions.

Exercise 2: The handler will be instructed to have the dog seated calmly by their side. A handler and dog will enter the area and move quickly through the room just out of reach of the dogs.

Acceptable reaction: dog may express natural interest and curiosity and/or may appear slightly startled but should not panic.

Unacceptable reaction: tries to run away; shows aggressiveness; or barks.

Part IV: The Working Environment

Exercise 1: The Team will be walking through a crowd with wheelchairs, walkers and unexpected distractions. This exercise demonstrates that the dog can move about politely in pedestrian traffic and is under control of the handler in hospital and nursing home situations. The dog and handler walk around and pass close to several people (at least three). One of the three should be walking with a walker with tennis balls cut and secured on the front legs. The dog may show some interest in the strangers but should continue to walk calmly next to the handler without evidence of over-exuberance, shyness or resentment. The handler may talk to the dog and encourage or praise the dog to maintain focus and engagement throughout the test. The dog should not jump on people in the crowd or strain on the leash.

Exercise 2: Reaction to distractions and motion sensitivity. This exercise demonstrates that the dog is comfortable when faced with common distracts in any given situation or in a nursing home or hospital. The evaluator will select and present two distractions. Distractions should include rolling a wheel chair or a walker towards the dog, dropping a crutch or cane, and creating loud noises.

Acceptable reaction: dog may express natural interest and curiosity and/or may appear slightly startled but should not panic.

Unacceptable reaction: tries to run away; shows aggressiveness; or barks.

Exercise 3: "Wait" for wheelchair petting. This exercise demonstrates that the dog will "wait" or remain in place when instructed to do so by the handler. The handler will approach with the dog up to a person in a wheelchair. Large dogs may sit next to the wheel chair during the exercise while small dogs (under 20 lbs) may sit calmly on the lap of the person in the wheelchair if requested. The handler should ask the dog to "wait" while being petted and then walk around the dog from one side to the other and behind the chair with the dog remaining in place the whole time. The handler may use encouragement to get the dog to wait. Handlers may use hand signals to encourage the dog to "wait" during this duration. The dog must not show resistance to petting or struggle to get away from the wheelchair. The handler should be aware enough to notice if there is something in their dog's behavior in context that is not allowing them to wait in position if requested.

Exercise 4: Calmness and stability around medical equipment and distractions. Your dog will be tested for response to high-pitched squealing, metallic noises (e.g., rattling cans), slamming doors, angry voices, loud laughter, and a monitor alarm. Your dog will be tested for his or her response to multiple noises arising at the same time as might occur on a hospital floor.

Acceptable reaction: dog may express natural interest and curiosity and/or may appear slightly startled but should not panic.

Unacceptable reaction: tries to run away; shows aggressiveness; or barks.

Exercise 5: Hospital beds and balloons in a room tied to a bed or a walker. The handler will approach with the dog up to a person in a hospital bed. Large dogs may need to sit next to the bed during the exercise while small dogs (under 20 lbs) may sit calmly to the side of the person in the bed if requested. The handler should ask the dog to "wait" while being petted. The handler may use encouragement to get the dog to wait. Handlers may use hand signals to encourage the dog to "wait" during this duration. The dog must not show resistance to petting or struggle to get away from the bed. The handler should be aware enough to notice if there is something in their dog's behavior in context that is not allowing them to wait in position if requested.

Part V: Giving Up a Toy

The evaluator will attempt to engage your dog in play with a toy and then take the toy away from your dog, as it would be done in a game like tug or fetch.

Acceptable reaction: release the toy to the evaluator without undo effort on the part of the evaluator

Unacceptable behavior: any negative reaction from the dog.