

Before you apply to volunteer as a Happy Tails handler, please consider the following:

Participation in Happy Tails involves a significant investment of time and effort on the part of all involved - volunteers, therapy dog evaluators and Aultman Hospital staff. We believe, however, that the potential benefits and joy that dog visitation may offer to our patients and their families are well worth the effort. When considering whether to apply, please carefully consider the following components:



Commitment

Time commitments include Happy Tail's screening, orientation, dog preparation time (grooming bathing, etc.), travel, and patient visits. All Happy Tails volunteers are asked to commit to two visits per month for a minimum of one year. Happy Tails Program commitments include following all Happy Tail's guidelines and requirements, such as behavioral and laboratory screening and primary dog health care. After reviewing all of the materials, ask yourself if you can commit to Happy Tails without undue burden on your resources and schedule.

Socialization

A therapy dog must feel comfortable and be confident in a variety of environments and situations – not just at home or at a favorite dog spot. A successful therapy dog typically has had many experiences outside his or her home environment. To determine if your dog is well socialized, review your dog's history of visiting new places along and his or her reactions.

Temperament

A therapy dog must have a stable, steady temperament regardless of the circumstances. Happy Tails dogs must maintain a strong motivation to visit even with individuals who may inadvertently handle them roughly because of their level of ability. Happy Tails dogs must be comfortable with people of all ages (from toddlers to the elderly), all ethnicities and all abilities (e.g. wheelchairs, blind, deaf).

Control

Therapy dogs must be under their owners' control at all times. They must demonstrate impeccable manners – there must be no barking, jumping or hard tugging on leashes. Happy Tails dogs must respond willingly to commands given by their owners regardless of the circumstances.

Teamwork

Because both the dog and the owner have tasks to perform during a visit, they must be able to work as a team. Teamwork extends beyond basic obedience commands – it includes your relationship and your communication with your dog.