

# ***Redlion*** Chesapeake & Labradors

Dogs for hunting, competition and family

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## **Thinking of Becoming a Pet Therapy Team?**

Interested in bringing smiles to some lonely faces? Well don't look any further! If you are willing to share your dog with others, bring happiness to residents of nursing homes, hospitals, and children with special needs read on. Since most people wanting to get started have so many questions. I hope that in this article we can answer most of these questions and help you get started today.

**Most people want to know if their dog is suitable.** You should ask yourself if your dog has the following traits:

Confident	Healthy
Out Going	Good Temperament
Love People More Than Other Dogs	Reliable
Likes to be Petted and Touched	Controllable
Predictable	Can Handle Stress

These are the basic traits that your dog should have. Certain populations can be more stressful to visit than others, so please keep that in mind when asking where you would like to visit with your dog.

**What is expected of the handler?** The first thing you should ask yourself is do you have the time to make this commitment. **Do not** jump into visiting every week with your dog. They can be very stressful to both you and your dog. Start slowly with once a month and keep your visits within an hour of your home. This will avoid stress and burnout. The reason most teams dropout of doing therapy dog work is burnout. Start slowly. If this is working, then visit twice a month.

Be on time and prepared. If you cannot keep an appointment, be sure to call either the day before or first thing in the morning. Most facilities will be putting you on their calendar and the residents will be expecting you. Give the facility ample time to reschedule or advise the residents that you are coming another day.

**How old should my dog be?** Dogs **must** be a year old in order to be registered with any of the therapy dog organizations. **Can I visit with a puppy?** Visiting with puppies can be a wonderful experience. However, evaluate each puppy to see if it is **suitable** for visitation. Some puppies can nip, jump on people, get easily stressed, or not be housebroken. It depends on the individual puppy and handler.

**What level of obedience training is required?** Dogs should have some beginner obedience, and be under total voice command. They will be required to pass the AKC Canine Good Citizen Test modified for therapy dogs. Your dog doesn't need a UD to be a therapy dog, but it will need good manners. They will need to know that they cannot jump on people or beds, bark excessively or pull the handler on a leash. Some dog obedience schools now offer a Therapy Dog Training Class. If this is not available, a Beginners and Novice Class should be all you need.

**Is a female or male make a better therapy dog?** This does not matter. It is up to the individual dog and if they have the above mentioned traits. With males, however, you should teach them to eliminate on command so that they do not have any territorial marking while visiting. Do not bring females in season on visits.

**Does my dog need to know tricks?** Even though knowing tricks can be helpful it is not necessary. In fact, Chesapeakes being retrievers are wonderful. They can catch a tennis ball that a resident throws, play find it with a toy, or carry a basket. Use your imagination and the things you can do on a visit are endless. I sometimes amuse young children with their chairs. I line them up in a row, place the dog on a sit, then ask the children to count to three with me and yell "Coco Over". It gets the children to participate. Anytime you are going to do jumping or tricks, please check and make sure that your dog has solid footing to avoid the dog getting hurt or the residents.

**Should I visit on my own or with a group?** Visits can be either done individually or with a local group if there is one. This would depend on your area and when you are available to visit. It is recommended, if possible, to

visit with an experienced team for the first several visits. In this way you can learn what is expected of you and your dog on a visit. If this is not available, have a staff member or the Activities Director go around with you on your first several visits. Going around with a staff member will allow you to see how the facility works, learn the facility, and give you some insight to each of the residents.

**Should I join and register my dog with a therapy dog organization?** Absolutely! These organizations ensure that your pet has the skills and aptitude for working in healthcare settings. They give you creditable when contacting a facility to visit. You will receive an identification badge, a tag for your dog, liability insurance, and networking. It is up to you which therapy dog organization to register with.

**What does my dog have to do for the test?** Both of the organizations listed in this article use a modified version of the American Kennel Clubs Canine Good Citizen Test. A copy can be obtained from the AKC. This test is to determine and demonstrate confidence and control of the dog.

- 1) Accepting a Friendly Stranger
- 2) Sitting Politely For Petting; Whole dog is examined and touched
- 3) Appearance and Grooming
- 4) Walk on a Loose Leash
- 5) Walking Through a Therapy Crowd including Medical Equipment
- 6) Sit, Down, and Stay on Voice Command
- 7) Come When Called
- 8) Reaction to Another Dog
- 9) Reaction to Distractions
- 10) Supervised Separation for 3 minutes

However, the Delta Society Pet Partners requires an additional test to see where and what type of population the dog is best suited to visit.

**How can I get in touch with these therapy dog organizations?** There are several quality organizations to join:

**Bright & Beautiful Therapy Dogs** Email: [info@golden-dogs.org](mailto:info@golden-dogs.org) [www.pet-therapist.com](http://www.pet-therapist.com)  
80 Powder Mill Rd, Morris Plains, NJ 07950, 973-292-3316

**Therapy Dogs International**, 88 Bartley Road, Flanders, NJ 07836, (973)252-9800  
Fax (973)252-7171 email: [tdi@gti.ne](mailto:tdi@gti.ne) Website: [www.tdi-dog.org](http://www.tdi-dog.org)

**Delta Society Pet Partners** email: [deltasociety@cis.compuserve.com](mailto:deltasociety@cis.compuserve.com) <http://www.deltasociety.org>  
289 Perimeter Road East, Renton, Wa 98055-1329, (800)869-6898 (206)226-7357 Fax-206-235-1076

**TheraPet, Inc.**, P.O. Box 787, Clark, NJ 07066 (732)602-1112 Website [www.therapet-inc.com](http://www.therapet-inc.com)

All of the above organizations have different requirements. Please write or call them for information.

**What do I do after I am registered? How do I get started?** Once you have registered with one of the above organizations and have received your credentials, you are ready to get started. If there is a local chapter in your area, get in touch with them for a list of facilities they are currently visiting. If you have in mind a facility you would like to visit, contact them and ask for the Activities Director, Recreational Therapist, or Volunteer Director. Different facilities have their pet therapy program fall under different departments. Offer to meet one on one with the director to discuss both of your goals and expectations. If there is currently a pet therapy program in process, contact the person in charge of the visits and observe several. Be sure that the facility has in mind the best interest of the residents, your dogs, and yourself.

If you are interested, start today. It is a wonderful and rewarding experience.

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