

Therapy Dog Academy

What's It All
About?

www.goldstardog.com



GOLD STAR
Dog Training





6-week
Group
Class

Engaging
Practical
Supportive
Challenging
Meaningful
FUN





Classes offer the challenge of working in a group, a collegial learning environment, individual attention, supportive instruction to build confidence (in dogs and people), and skills for getting certified and working as a therapy dog team.



20-pg Course Booklet

Easy-to-read, filled with photos, packed with tips—your therapy dog manual.

Authored by Deb, a therapy dog handler since the mid-1990s; she's directed a large therapy dog certification and training program since 2005.

The Working Dog Relationship

Even though therapy dogs should enjoy what they do, they need us to support and guide them. You are a TEAM—success as a therapy dog team is founded on having a strong relationship.

This means:

- Having a positive working relationship built on humane training;
- Knowing your dog—his/her strengths, limitations, likes and dislikes, and how s/he communicates;
- Building mutual trust and respect and having a dog that looks to you for guidance;
- Being able to communicate clearly and gently to the dog what is expected, with the dog willingly complying; and
- Having fun together!



4 Traits of a Great Handler

You and your dog are a TEAM. Even though it may feel like your dog is the star of the show, you are absolutely critical to your dog's success, the quality of the visits, and the safety of everyone involved.

It's not enough to have a wonderful dog.

You and your dog are a team. You serve a much more important purpose than simply chauffeuring your dog to visits.

1

Is aware (of everything) and is proactive

- *This side of the bed has tubes my dog might get tangled in.*
- *There's an isolation sign on a patient's door.*
- *This staff member seems uncomfortable with my dog.*

2

Understands dog body language, knows when the dog is stressed or uncomfortable, and proactively responds

- *My dog is starting to look to the door instead of wanting to visit.*
- *My dog is wary of the moving curtain in between hospital beds.*
- *This person is patting my dog too roughly, and my dog wants to disengage.*

Deb is a patient, supportive and gifted instructor and her passion for dogs shines through in all she does. Maple is now certified and making a difference through TDV (Therapy Dogs of Vermont), all thanks to Deb!!

Ellyn and Maple (Yellow Lab)

WEEK 2 LESSONS

This week, you will be working on:

- Attention and redirection to you;
- Heeling and leash handling; and
- Getting reacquainted with the "check it out" tool, brushing up on the training approach, and fine-tuning your handling skills.

We reviewed the training approach a bit in class. A few key concepts:

- Your dog will likely need to perform *without treats/reward toys* (for the test and when working). Your dog should also be able to perform these skills *without leash pops, other physical corrections*, and/or being physically manipulated (e.g., pushing butt down for a sit).
- Even though our goal is to eliminate *food rewards*, you may need to use them in new or difficult training situations. If your dog has pulled off something difficult and impressed you, give him/her that hot dog!
- **Go slow, step by step!** Be sure your dog is consistently and easily responding to a given request BEFORE making it more difficult/using it in a new context. Going too fast will frustrate and confuse your dog—and not build a consistent, reliable response.
- **Always thank your dog** for doing what you ask (verbal praise, a pat, a scratch). If you stop reinforcing/acknowledging the behavior completely, your dog will stop doing it. Think about it—if your psychchecks at work stopped and no one thanked you for a job well done, how long would you keep going to the office or offering help?

Attention and Redirection to You

With this skill, we are asking your dog to look at your face when you ask. Called "attention" or "focus" work, this skill is the foundation of all training. If you cannot get your dog's attention, it's tough to teach him/her anything—and it's difficult to work with him/her in the distracting situations and new environments that therapy dog work may throw at you. This skill underpins the working dog relationship—it's a not only a relationship-builder (looking into each other's eyes produces the warm fuzzies, provides an opportunity to read your dog and check in with him/her, and centers you both). It also serves some very practical purposes: a bridge to other cues (get attention and then give the next cue); get your dog's attention quickly, and/or to redirect unwanted behavior such as fixating or barking.

Skills Checklist:

- Quick, reliable response (everywhere and anytime):** Your dog is able to quickly and reliably able to look at you when you ask—no matter where you are and what may be happening around you.
- Moving from excitement to calm:** When your dog gets excited, you are able to calm him/her with some re-centering eye contact.
- Automatic check-ins:** Your dog is looking to you when you haven't asked.

Exercises/Tips:

- *Take it on the road.* Ask your dog to look at you whenever you're in new places—a new neighborhood on your walk, downtown, in a dog-friendly store, etc.. In how many new places/new situations can you get your dog to look at you?

After taking Deb's therapy dog class, Senna and I had no trouble completing our Therapy Dogs of Vermont (TDV) certification.

Clare and Senna (Golden Retriever)

Weekly Training Guides

Detailed class notes and weekly goals. Thoughtful, fun, manageable exercises supplement classroom learning.

Worksheets

Apply important concepts, record progress, gauge readiness for therapy dog work.

Instructor Support

Deb's available for questions before, after, and in-between classes—even after the course ends.

Worksheet: What Visits Work for Me and My Dog?

You may have pictured it in your head. When I get certified, I'll... brighten the day of kiddos in the pediatric ward; soothe a lonely elder in the nursing home; teach children to read at the library... You may have in mind a place or population you want to visit—and maybe that's where you end up. Or, once you start working, you may change where you go and who you visit. Or, maybe you don't really know what you want to do. It's all okay! This is a discovery process. Ultimately, you'll want to find a place both of you feel comfortable in and meaningful. Use the prompts below to think about what sort of parameters you might want to consider when thinking about where you and your dog would like to visit.

	Populations/Programs/Settings	
	Age group (e.g., teens, children, seniors)?	
	Special needs? At-risk populations?	
	Type of facility or program (e.g., hospital, school)	
	Facility Vibe	
	Noisy or quiet?	
	Calm or fast-paced?	
	Lots of rules/restrictions or more laid back?	
	Positive, light atmosphere or emotional, heavy atmosphere?	
	Working with staff or on your own?	
	Access to Visit Location	
	Stairs or elevators?	
	Distance from front door to visit location? Easy access to outside? Places to take breaks?	
	Visits all in one room or walking to various rooms?	
	Characteristics of Visitation Location	
	Flooring (hardwood, carpet, tile)?	
	Wide open space, or tight/smaller areas?	
	Temperature (too hot, too cold)?	
	Smells and Other Distractions	
	Kitchen or food nearby?	
	Smells of cleaners?	
	Resident or visiting pets?	
	Cleanliness (items on the floor your dog might lick, ingest, etc.)	

Worksheet: My Tools, Training Log

Use this worksheet to capture the tools you will develop throughout the course and to think about how you might apply the skills we will learn. A sample training log is on the last page.

MY TOOLS

Decompression/stress-busting breaks for my dog (see week 2):

My getting-ready-to-work warm-up routine (see week 3):

I know when my dog is unhappy, uncomfortable, overwhelmed, or tired (see body language primer) when s/he:

I know when my dog is engaged, happy, and comfortable (see body language primer) when s/he:

When my dog is getting tense, worried, or unsure, I can:

When my dog is getting excited, distracted, and unable to respond to cues, I can:

Results!

These are just some of our graduates—now certified, working therapy dogs!

See them all at:

www.goldstardog.com



GOLD STAR Dog Training

Deb's knowledge of the challenges across settings where a therapy dog may be working is the voice in my head as we make visits. Deb works to bring as much "reality" to class as possible and provides handlers guidance which leads to success during the TDV test and evaluations!



Paulette and Ivy (Australian Shepherd)

