



ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS (AAI)

Therapy Animal Implementation Guide

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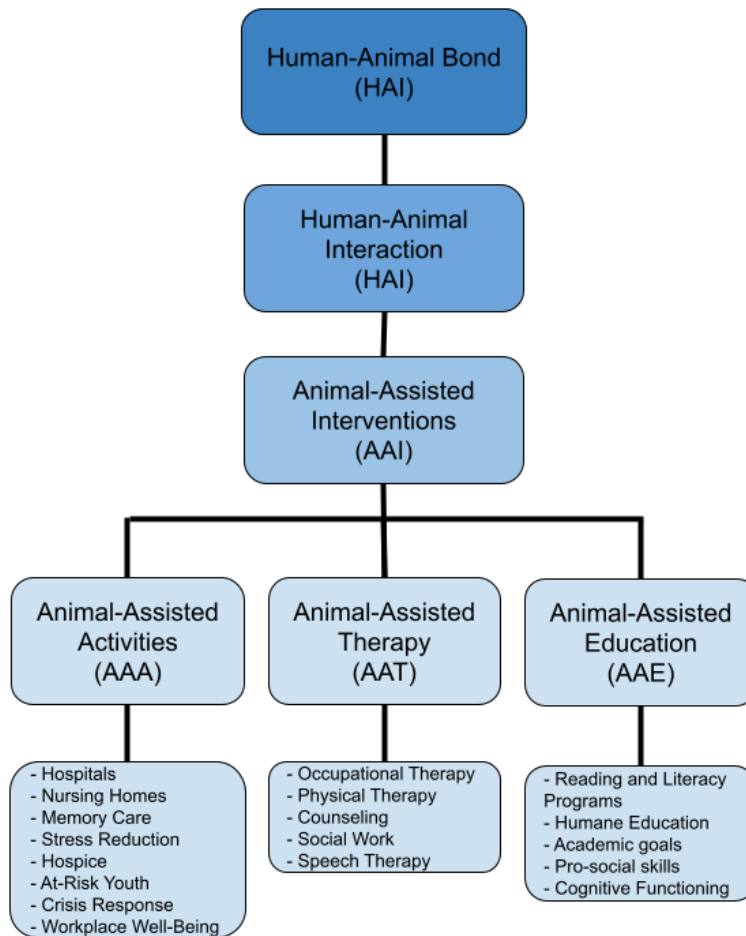
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Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI)

Animal-Assisted interventions are goal oriented and structured interventions that intentionally incorporate animals in health, education, and human services for the purpose of therapeutic gains and improved health and wellness. Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT), Animal-Assisted Education (AAE) and Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA) are all forms of Animal-Assisted Interventions. In all these interventions, the animal may be part of a volunteer therapy animal team working under the direction of a professional or an animal that belongs to the professional him/herself. - [Pet Partners](#)



IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURE

DCSD Certified Therapy Dog Staff Teams

* DCSD staff interested in working with a certified therapy dog

- Verbal approval from the School Principal
 - School Principal and/or DCSD have final approval of implementation of all AAI programming
- Meet with the DCSD AAI Committee for initial consultation, guidance and/or support.
 - Email Laura Wilson - DCSD AAI Lead - lwilson2@dcsdk12.org
- Review the DCSD Therapy Animal Procedures Manual on the [DCSD AAI Site](#)
- Certify yourself and your animal through a DCSD recognized and approved certification organization. See page 11.
- Obtain Professional Liability Coverage for yourself and the certified therapy dog. See page 13.
 - Must include specific coverage for a canine in a professional setting. Written documentation of coverage for the canine must be included
 - DCSD recommends a minimum coverage of \$1M
 - DCSD funds (P-cards) are **not** permitted to be used to purchase liability insurance.
- Attend the DCSD AAI Course (approximately 4 hours)
 - Session facilitated by DCSD AAI Committee
 - Must complete initial consultation with committee prior to attending
- School nurse to email families identified with an animal allergy
 - Collaborate with your school nurse to run a report in IC and obtain that list. The handler(s) is responsible for being aware of students listed.
 - [Allergy Communication - DCSD AAI](#)
 - [Guidance for nurses](#)
- Inform school staff
 - [Staff Communication - DCSD AAI](#)
 - [Examples of presentations/communications](#) (optional)
 - If there are multiple therapy dog teams working in one building, each communication should include contact information for each handler/site contact.

- Inform school community
 - [Letter to Families - DCSD AAI](#)
 - e.g. Email, announce in your school's newsletter, on the school website, express check-in, etc
 - If there are multiple therapy dog teams working in one building, each communication should include contact information for each handler/site contact.
- Complete the DCSD Animal Assisted Interventions - Program Request Form on the [DCSD AAI Site](#) and attach all required documents to the form.
 - [DCSD Therapy Dog Veterinarian Health Certificate](#)
 - Updated Vaccination Record
 - Current Liability Insurance with canine coverage
 - Current Therapy Dog Certification
 - Must be recertified at least every two years
 - Required communications (Allergy, Communication, Staff)
- Identify areas in the school the therapy dog will be working
 - Identify restricted areas (i.e. Cafeteria, nurse's office, etc.)
 - Establish what will happen with the therapy dog in case of a crisis situation
 - Designate an area where the therapy dog can go during a crisis situation
 - Designate at least two staff members that are willing and able to temporarily take care of the therapy dog in case of a crisis
 - If the handler becomes unavailable in order to meet the needs of a student, this designated person can bring the therapy dog to a safe location. Practice this process throughout the school year.
- Collaborate with building maintenance staff to schedule extra cleanings of utilized areas

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

- An MOU will be sent via email from DCSD Mental Health Leadership once the completed form is submitted and DCSD AAI course has been completed
 - Fill out completely and collect signatures of required parties (e.g. principal, nurse) and return the MOU to DCSD Mental Health Leadership
 - An email of approval to start will then be sent; once received, the certified therapy dog will then be able to start in your building

- Announce the program to the student body and teach expectations
 - Explain who the therapy dog is and why they are at school
 - [Examples](#)
 - Include expectations and boundaries with students
 - e.g. ask to pet, be safe, walk up to the therapy dog calmly, etc
- Begin introducing your certified DCSD therapy dog!
 - Review Ethical Considerations. See page 15.
- Identify students who will participate in ongoing, scheduled, and direct interventions with the therapy animal.
 - Have parents/guardians complete and sign a permission form and return it to the school administration before the child will meet the animal for the first time, if applicable.
 - Contact families
 - Provide [DCSD Permission for AAI](#)
 - Establish goals and specific interventions for each student
- Complete a site visit with the DCSD Animal Assisted Interventions staff
 - Sign up link included in monthly newsletters or email a [DCSD AAI committee member](#)
 - Two site visits the first year of work
 - First - Within the first 2 weeks of implementation
 - Second - Before the end of the school year

Returning teams, prior to each school year

- Send [required communications](#)
 - Nurse to send communication
 - [Allergy Communication - DCSD AAI](#)
 - [Guidance for nurses](#)
 - Inform school staff
 - Inform the school community
 - Announce in express check-in process, school newsletter, website, etc
- Complete the DCSD Animal Assisted Interventions - Program Request Form on the [DCSD AAI Site](#) and attach all required documents to the form.
 - [DCSD Therapy Dog Veterinarian Health Certificate](#)
 - Updated Vaccination Record
 - Current Liability Insurance with canine coverage

- Current Therapy Dog Certification
 - Must be recertified at least every two years
 - Data collected from the previous school year organized to submit to support proof of program effectiveness
 - Required communications (Allergy, Communication, Staff)
-

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-

- Identify students who will participate in ongoing, scheduled, and direct interventions with the therapy animal. Parents will be required to fill out and sign a permission form and return it to the school administration before the child will meet the animal for the first time, if applicable.
 - Contact families
 - Provide [DCSD Permission Slip for AAI](#)
 - Establish goals and specific interventions for each student
- Have another great school year!
- Complete a site visit with the DCSD Animal Assisted Interventions staff
 - One site visit completed each school year

Visiting Volunteer Therapy Dog Teams

If you are interested in partnering with a volunteer team to visit your school regularly we have partnerships with the following organizations:

- **Pet Partners & Denver Pet Partners**

- “Pet Partners’ mission is to improve human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. As a leader in the field, Pet Partners is continuously evolving to meet the diverse needs of global communities, with innovative programming, activities, and educational opportunities that are centered around the human-animal bond. Humans and animals share a deep, innate connection, and we believe that through the human-animal bond we can improve the physical, social, and emotional lives of more people and communities.”
- <https://petpartners.org/>
 - To request a visiting team, complete the [CONTACT FORM](#)
- <https://denverpetpartners.org/>
 - To request a visiting team, contact Susan Horecki
 - susanhorecki@denverpetpartners.org

- **Canine Companions**

- “Canine Companions is a non-profit organization that enhances the lives of people with disabilities by providing highly trained service dogs and ongoing support to ensure quality partnerships. While our mission is to provide highly trained service dogs to people with disabilities, we believe the dogs released from our program can still have an incredible ripple effect in the world through their work as therapy dogs. With this goal in mind, we created this program to certify our amazing dogs to have an opportunity to provide support and comfort to members of our community.”
- Request a Canine Companion Certified Therapy Dog Team to visit your school: [HERE](#)
- <https://canine.org/service-dogs/our-dogs/therapy-dogs/>

A district employee at your school will need to be identified as the designated school based AAI Therapy Animal Program contact. They will be responsible for the following tasks:

- Verbal approval from the School Principal.
 - Contact DCSD AAI Committee for guidance and/or support, if needed.
 - Laura Wilson - lwilson2@dcsdk12.org
 - Review the DCSD Therapy Animal Procedures Manual
 - Connect with an approved Therapy Dog Volunteer Organization and request a visit(s)
 - Request from each team:
 - Proof of certification
 - Proof of liability insurance
 - Vaccination Record from Veterinarian
 - [DCSD Therapy Dog Veterinarian Health Certificate](#)
 - *Waived for Pet Partners/Denver Pet Partners teams
- Collaborate with the school nurse to identify students with allergy concerns
 - Contact families on the allergies/concerns list to provide information and answer questions about the program
 - [Allergy Communication - DCSD AAI](#)
 - [Guidance for nurses](#)
- Inform school staff
 - [Letter to School Staff](#)
- Inform school community
 - [Letter to Families - DCSD AAI](#)
 - Announce in school newsletter, website, etc
- Complete the DCSD Animal Assisted Interventions - Program Request Form on the [DCSD AAI Site](#) and attach all required documents to the form. (To be completed by district staff)
 - The DCSD Animal Assisted Intervention staff will be in contact with you after forms and documents have been received. Please do not submit a form without required documents.
- Identify areas in the school the animal will be working
 - Identify restricted areas (i.e. Cafeteria, nurse's office, etc.)
- Collaborate with building maintenance staff to schedule extra cleanings of utilized areas

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

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 - An email of approval to start will then be sent; once received, the certified therapy dog team will then be able to start in your building

The process is to be completed each school year for returning volunteer teams. If there are additional teams added throughout the year, the request form must be completed for each individual team. Proof of communication does not need to be repeated.

DCSD Recognized & Approved Therapy Animal Certifications

- **Professional Therapy Dogs of Colorado (PTDC)**
 - Certification available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc).
 - PTDC offers pre-screenings to evaluate where your dog is in the process. They also include a 2 day seminar in which the handler learns more about the implementation process and ways to keep both therapy dogs and clients safe
 - Offers continued support/consultation for handlers and their therapy animal
 - Do not provide liability insurance
 - Cost = \$400 (includes pre-screen, 2 day workshop, manual, test and certification)
 - Recertification every two years = \$75
 - www.professionaltherapydogsofcolorado.com

- **Krieger Dogs**
 - Available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc)
 - Does not provide liability insurance
 - Certification available to teams that have utilized their training program
 - Cost = \$70/session (number of sessions varies)
 - <https://kriegerdogs.godaddysites.com/>

- **Faithfully K9 Service Dog and Dog Training**
 - Available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc)
 - Does not provide liability insurance
 - Certification available to teams that have utilized their training program
 - Cost = \$85/session (number of sessions varies)
 - www.faithfullyk9.com

- **Freedom Service Dogs**
 - Placement of a certified facility dog available for mental health professionals (School Social Workers, School Psychologists, Counselors) or public safety professionals.
 - Facility dog placement with a fully certified facility dog
 - Application required
 - Handler will participate in a week long training program prior to bringing their therapy dog home
 - Applicants will be placed on a waitlist. Current wait is 1.5 to 3 years and is dependent on dog availability and fit to role
 - <https://freedom servicedogs.org/facility-dogs/>

- **Canine Companions**

- Placement of a certified therapy dog available for all school professionals (mental health, teachers, administrators, etc)
- Therapy dog placement with a fully certified therapy dog
 - Application required
 - Handler will participate in training and certification requirements with organization
- Cost = \$3,500 adoption fee, \$100 certification
 - CC covers liability insurance fees, provides vest and ongoing support
 - \$30 recertification fee each year
- <https://canine.org/service-dogs/our-dogs/therapy-dogs/>

* Please reach out to the [DCSD AAI Committee](#) if you or your organization would like to be included as one of our recognized and approved certifications. DCSD supports and embraces the [Institute for Human Animal Connections \(IHAC\) Position Statement on Training Methods and Equipment for Therapy Dogs](#)

Options for Professional Liability w/ Therapy Dog/Canine Coverage

- **Healthcare Providers Service Organization (HPSO)**
 - Healthcare professionals (Counselors, Occupational Therapists, Social Workers, Speech Language Providers, Physical Therapists, Nurses, Psychologists)
 - Offers professional liability with an elected canine therapy coverage
 - <https://www.hpso.com/>
- **Preferra**
 - Healthcare professionals (Counselors, Occupational Therapists, Social Workers, Speech Language Providers, Physical Therapists, Nurses, Psychologist)
 - Offers professional liability with an elected canine therapy coverage
 - <https://preferrainsurance.com/>
- **Business Insurers of the Carolinas**
 - Offers Professional Liability Coverage with canine coverage with an approved certification and/or membership (AAAIP, Alliance of Therapy Dogs)
 - This is available for district employees who may not qualify for the above options (e.g. teachers, administrators, classified staff, etc)
 - <https://www.business-insurers.com/therapy-animal-handlers>

Continuing Education Programs (Optional)

- **University of Denver-Institute for Human Animal Connections (IHAC)**
 - Does not certify animal
 - Offers high level education and certification in Animal Assisted Interventions for professionals
 - “The Institute for Human-Animal Connection (IHAC) intentionally elevates the value of the living world and the interrelationship and health of people, other animals and the environment. This is accomplished through natural and social science-informed education, applied knowledge, research and advocacy, with an ethical regard for all species.”
 - Cost=\$3,500 (Online program with one weekend held, in person, at DU)
 - Nationally recognized certification programs
 - <https://socialwork.du.edu/humananimalconnection>

- **Association of Animal-Assisted Intervention Professionals (AAAIP)**
 - Does not certify animal
 - Offers a variety of courses that prepare and qualify you as a Certified Animal-Assisted Intervention Specialist (C-AAIS)
 - “Earning the C-AAIS credential distinguishes you as a professional who is qualified to integrate therapy animals into practice, positioning you as an advocate for the welfare of both the humans and the animals involved in AAI. Investing in certification is an investment in yourself and your long-term career”.
 - Cost = Approximately \$1,155 (Includes classes and final exam)
 - Recertification = \$275
 - www.aaaiponline.org

Ethical Considerations

The relationship between a handler, the therapy animal and the participants should be mutually beneficial; meaning that the handler, the animal and those working with the animal are all benefiting from the working relationship.

DCSD supports and embraces the [Institute for Human Animal Connections \(IHAC\) Position Statement on Training Methods and Equipment for Therapy Dogs](#).

Five Freedom's

- 1) Freedom from Hunger and Thirst
- 2) Freedom from discomfort
- 3) Freedom from pain, injury or disease
- 4) Freedom from fear and distress
- 5) Freedom to express species specific behavior (normal behavior)

Therapy Dog Bill of Rights

Introducing your animal

You know your animal.

You know your school/program.

This is a detailed section of suggestions to ensure your animal enjoys the experience and in turn, the program benefits your school. You want your animal to want to come to work and enjoy his/her time there. Integrating the animal too fast may overwhelm the animal and create behaviors due to the stress of a school environment. Do your best to anticipate and prepare your animal for all encounters. There are going to be situations that your animal may encounter that are unexpected/out of your control; do your best in preparing for how to respond to those situations/create a safety plan for the unexpected.

* Time each day should be determined based on how the animal is responding to the environment. Some stress is okay and is expected-this is new! If your animal is shying away repeatedly, hiding, growling, etc., it may be time to end the day. If they are having fun and clearly enjoying their time, keep it going! You may need to repeat steps/days if your animal is showing signs of high stress.

Resources:

[Canine Body Language](#)

[iSpeak Dog Website](#)

As a reminder, the therapy dog must be approved by the district and school principal *before* the first day the therapy dog will be present in the school building.

The process below is not required but recommended to support your therapy dog's initial start.

DAY 1:

- Walk the animal around school but do not enter
 - Play with the animal
 - Provide lots of treats/fun

DAY 2:

- Enter the building on a day when no one else is present.
 - Hang out in the room where your animal will spend most of their time
 - Set expectations immediately
 - Stay on leash, practice commands, etc.
 - Have the animal spend time in their “area”
 - A crate or other enclosure is ideal as it is an area the animal can “take a break” when he/she needs space or is an area they can be when they are not interacting with students/staff
 - The animal should know that this is a space that they can go to and not be bothered; this is their safe place.
 - Provide lots of treats/fun

DAY 3:

- Enter building on a day when no one else is present
 - Walk around the school and have the animal become familiar with all the areas he/she may work
 - Practice commands and other activities that are fun for the animal that you may use while he/she is working
 - Do not go into areas that are restricted to the animal
 - Cafeteria, classrooms, bathrooms, etc.
 - Going into these areas may confuse them about their boundaries
 - Provide lots of treats/fun

DAY 4:

- Arrange to have a few trusted staff members in the building that your animal may interact with frequently and introduce your animal appropriately
 - Have these people provide treats for your animal when he/she interacts with them appropriately

- Make it fun and engaging, but make sure to establish expectations for how you want your animal to interact with people at work
- If there will be times that the animal will be in his/her crate while you're not in the room, create opportunities for that to happen
- Provide lots of treats/fun

DAY 5:

- Come in on a staff work day
 - Introduce your animal to small groups of staff at a time both out in the hallways and in the animal's primary work area
 - Continue to be consistent with work expectations
 - Your animal should know the difference between how to act when working vs when not working
 - Spend some time in your office/classroom and let the animal get used to the many sounds and smells that come about with people in the building
 - If there will be times that the animal will be in their crate while you're not in the room, create opportunities for that to happen
 - Provide lots of treats/fun

DAY 6:

- Come in on one more staff work day
 - Repeat the same strategies as Day 5.
 - Work through any behaviors or stressors that may have arisen
 - Before 100's to 1000's of students arrive, your animal should be comfortable with the 40-150 adults in the building
 - Practice utilizing your designated crisis support person and safety procedures
 - Make it all fun!
 - Continue to practice commands and, if possible, facilitate a group/session with staff. It will be fun and helpful for the staff to see what type of work you and your animal will be doing with students.

The next step is to bring your animal in on a school day.

- If there are still concerning behaviors and/or your animal is showing signs of high levels of stress, repeat day 6 as many times as needed. Please do not rush this process as the more patient and thorough you are, the more comfortable your animal will be, which will make a huge difference in the success of the program.

DAY ____:

- School Day!
 - Do not have your animal meet with students quite yet, if possible.
 - More new sounds and smells to experience
 - Walk around the halls when students are in their classrooms
 - Limit interactions, just allow your animal to get used to the environment and energy that comes with a school full of people
 - Provide lots of treats/fun
- Allow this process to take as much time as needed
 - Be mindful of how your animal may feel in this environment and how overstimulating this experience can be

DAY ____:

- Individual interventions
 - Start with a few students each day whose behaviors are expected and who have had interactions with animals throughout their life
 - Make sure to pick students that will follow the rules and listen to your directions regarding how to act with the animal.
 - Allow the animal to interact how they want to
 - Don't force an interaction
 - Don't forget the 5 Freedoms
 - Make it all fun!
 - Provide lots of treats/fun

Keep a routine as much as possible. At this point, you may have learned some new things about your animal; how they show stress, how they show excitement/joy, their favorite people in the school, etc. Keep reading what your animal is communicating to you and advocate for their needs. Remember, if your animal is enjoying their job, it will be a mutually beneficial experience for everyone. You will be amazed at the impact you and your animal will have on your students, coworkers and the school's climate overall! If you ever have concerns or questions about your dog's behavior or comfort level, please don't hesitate to reach out for support.