



For Animal Therapy Teams and Program Coordinators:

10 Considerations for Adding the Courts to Your Facility Visits

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A growing number of jurisdictions across the country are including the use of trained and registered animals – such as therapy and “facility” dogs – to offer therapeutic assistance to crime victims. The National District Attorneys Association assembled as task force in 2012 to offer recommended guidelines as best practices for including animals that offer therapeutic assistance in the criminal justice field. These were their conclusions:

1. The animal should be adequately trained/evaluated, registered/certified, be assessed for skill and aptitude to safely and effectively offer therapeutic assistance, and be a member in good standing of an organization that registers/certifies animals for therapeutic purpose. Animals may be certified to work in other areas along with being registered/certified by an organization for therapeutic purpose.
2. The animal has been trained with one person (handler) to steward the animal when working with crime victims and to advocate for the wellbeing of the animal at all times. The handler has received training from an organization on offering their animal for therapeutic purpose, understands their animal; recognizes when their animal is stressed or tired; and has received additional training from the criminal justice agency on the protocols and policies of the agency, the expected roles of the handler-animal therapy team, and the expected interaction so as not to interfere with the collection of evidence or the effective administration of justice. The handler will abide by agency protocol.
3. The handler-animal team has been trained/assessed for working with crime victims, including maltreated children, and has a proficiency in one or more of these categories:
 - a. As a greeter at an agency;
 - b. As support during a forensic interview or evaluation;
 - c. As support during a medical examination;
 - d. As support during individual or group therapy;
 - e. As support during pre-trial or pre-hearing preparation;
 - f. As support during trial, hearing testimony or depositions.
 - g. As other support area as the agency sees fit including waiting rooms, children’s playrooms, reading areas etc.
4. The handler-animal team should be given access beforehand to the specific environment they will be working in (courthouse, prosecutor’s office, children’s advocacy center, interview rooms, etc.), in order to assess and ensure the comfort level of the handler-animal therapy team in that setting.
5. The handler-animal team will be matched appropriately to the crime victim, agency and/or situation so as to be the most effective.

6. The handler should avoid serving in a dual capacity (e.g. as the sole criminal justice professional and handler at the same time) since the duties of the criminal justice professional may conflict with the primary duty of the handler which, as an animal advocate, is to be solely responsible for the animal at all times. Moreover, this will avoid any potential conflict of interest and clearly identify who the handler is representing should an incident occur.
7. The handler should undergo a criminal background check and must satisfy confidentiality requirements of the agency and state law.
8. The handler-animal team should be covered by a liability insurance policy with limits of not less than \$1,000,000 from the registering/certifying organization or the criminal justice agency.
9. The handler of the animal has the sole responsibility for the humane stewardship of the therapy animal and must function as the animal's advocate at all times.
10. Use the guidelines outlined in the *Therapy Animals Supporting Kids (TASK)*TM *Manual*, to aid in the investigation of crimes involving young and/or vulnerable victims or witnesses and in situations where the animal would aid in preparing for, or testifying in a hearing or trial.

Please note that these guidelines are not meant to impact or diminish other successful programs that safely include animals assisting crime victims.