



WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE EVALUATION



St. John Ambulance

Therapy Dog 

WHAT THE EVALUATION TESTS FOR

Handlers and dogs are observed from the moment they enter the area or facility for the evaluation. Evaluators are assessing the dog's temperament and the handler's ability to exercise care and control.



**CALM & POLITELY
MANNERED**



**SEEKS INTERACTION AND
ENJOYS ATTENTION**



CARE AND CONTROL
Advocacy and Handling



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OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Meeting the Evaluator

Exercise 2: Dog Under Control

Exercise 3: Walking Through a Milling Crowd

Exercise 4: Praise and Interaction

Exercise 5: Dog Meet Dog

Scenario Sequence: Stationary Crowd Scene
Exercises 6, 7 and 8

Scenario Sequence: Wheelchair and Distraction
Exercises 9, 10, 11 and 12



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Exercise 1: Meeting the Evaluator

The Evaluator will approach the dog and handler, with their arm and hand outstretched asking the handler's permission to pet the dog. *Dogs under 10lbs may be carried by the handler.* The Evaluator will pet the dog on the top of the head, run their fingers lightly through the coat, fondle the ears, head, tail, belly, and lift each front paw all while checking the dog for cleanliness and grooming.

The purpose of this exercise is to assess the dog's overall social skills with people, the dog's appearance and grooming. This exercise confirms that the dog shows no protective or territorial aggression and is open and friendly, enjoying attention and petting from new people.



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Exercise 2: Dog Under Control

The “L” pattern was chosen as it is used in almost every situation of normal activity and though short in length, it easily demonstrates the handler’s control of the dog. The pattern will be done as follows: forward, left turn, halt, forward, about turn, right turn, and a halt at the end. The dog does not have to sit with the halts but should stay reasonably close to the handler. Leash should be held loosely and short in length.

The purpose of this exercise is to see if the handler has good control of the dog, and the dog walks well on a leash.



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Exercise 3: Walking Through a Milling Crowd

A group of people will carry on a conversation to stimulate a noisy and busy time at a facility. When walking through the crowd, the dog may show interest in the people without being overly exuberant. The dog must be on a loose lead, should stay reasonably close to the handler, and may not interfere with the handler's movements. The crowd will not intentionally avoid or block the dog's progress but move as if they are going through a congested area.

The purpose of this exercise is to assess the dog's reaction while walking through a crowd and confirm the dog is comfortable, confident around equipment such as walkers, crutches, and canes but looking to the handler occasionally throughout exercise.

Exercise 4: Praise and Interaction

Using verbal praise, trick command, petting, and/or playing with a toy, the handler will be asked to engage in ten seconds of play, exciting their dog. Then on command from the Evaluator, "calm the dog" all the while maintaining a firm hold on the leash.



The purpose of this exercise is to assess how quickly and easily a handler can calm their dog when it is in a state of excitement and/or play and confirm the control of the handler.



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Exercise 5: Dog Meet Dog

With the dog on a short lead in the left-hand position, two teams will be asked to stand opposite each. The evaluator will ask that they walk forward until they are facing each other at arms-length. They will then halt, wave or shake hands, and introduce themselves. Dogs can be in a sit or standing position but must be under control. The Evaluator will instruct the teams will then continue walking past each other, shoulder to shoulder, to the marked spot in front of them, turn and halt.

The purpose of this exercise is to observe the dog's behavior when another dog is in close proximity.



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STATIONARY CROWD SCENE

The following evaluations are conducted on one dog at a time as a sequence, and not one test at a time. When a dog is called out, it is evaluated on exercises 6, 7, and 8 consecutively.



Exercises 6 and 7: Stationary Crowd Scene

A group of five to six people using walkers, canes and/or crutches form a circle. Each person will present a different scenario and petting the dog in various ways and different locations on the body.

Specifically, one person in the circle will non-responsive to the dog in any way. The handler will encourage their dog to move closer and say hello.

The purpose of this exercise is to assess the dog's reaction and behaviour when confronted with behaviours, equipment, accessories, smells, and clothing that are possibly new to them or a reminder of something in their past or present life whether positive or negative.

Exercise 8: Stationary Crowd Scene (Continued)

Handler/Dog Team will stand in the center of the circle with the dog sitting beside the handle. Upon command the crowd will advance together with one arm outstretched and upward fist closed towards the dog. The people will move in a friendly and non-threatening manner, talking and petting the dog, while using the dog's name. The dog will be touched from behind, from both sides and from the front by the crowd members.

The purpose of this exercise is to make sure the dog is comfortable during a “swarming” situation where it may be touched by people it cannot see and be in very close contact with many people at one time, not being able to see all of them.



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WHEELCHAIR AND DISTRACTION

The following evaluations are conducted on one dog at a time as a sequence, and not one test at a time. When a dog is called out, it is evaluated on exercises 9, 10, 11 and 12 consecutively.



Exercise 9: Wheelchair and Distraction

The Handler/Dog Team approaches an individual in the wheelchair, situating the dog sideways, next to the chair. The individual will pet the dog and talks to the dog in an excited manner.

The purpose of this exercise is to observe calm and accepting behaviour when the dog turns around and sees the wheelchair close to it. The dog should be happy to see the person sitting in the wheelchair as well as any staff or family assisting by displaying a wagging tail, and controlled excitement.



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Exercise 10: Wheelchair and Distraction (Continued)

The Evaluator will offer a treat to the dog, holding firmly to it for a few seconds, before allowing the dog to have it. The dog must take the treat gently or is allowed to refuse the treat.



The purpose of this exercise is to observe the dog taking a treat offered to them during a visit gently and calmly, without causing harm to the person offering the treat.



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Exercise 11 and 12: Wheelchair and Distraction (Continued)

With the dog and handler in front of the Evaluator in the wheelchair, or with a small dog on the Evaluator's lap, an assistant will jog quickly across the room coming from behind the dog.

Immediately following the jogger, a person standing behind the dog will drop a stainless-steel bowl.

The purpose of these two exercises is to observe the dog's reaction and recovery time after being startled by an unexpected action or loud noise.



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DISQUALIFICATIONS

Safety is held to a high standard in the Program and an evaluator will stop an evaluation should there be a safety risk at any time. Dogs will be observed during the entire evaluation, not just during formal exercises.

There are three major reasons for a dog to be disqualified from the evaluation:



**RELIEVING ITSELF
IN FACILITY**



**ANY TYPE OF
AGGRESSION**



**SHYNESS OR BOISTEROUS
EXUBERANCE**



How to Prepare for an Evaluation

Many of these exercises can be practiced in public areas or businesses that permit dogs. Exposure to different stimuli and distractions helps to build resiliency in a dog.

When in doubt, consult a certified and reputable dog trainer.





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COME PREPARED

A well-fitting flat buckle leather or nylon collar and flat leather or nylon leash that does not exceed 6ft.



Flat Buckle Collar



No-Chain Martingale



Choke on D-Ring

Also bring a favourite toy and treats of choice!



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HARNESS EXCEPTION

Due to fit or for health and safety of the dog, St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog staff and volunteer evaluators are permitted to make exceptions that will allow non-corrective harnesses with two-points of connection.



*It is strongly encouraged
that you reach out and gain
permission in advance of
your evaluation.*

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EVALUATION TIPS

- 🐾 Take a deep breath and try to relax, nervousness travels down the leash!
- 🐾 Ask questions and seek clarification. Our intention is not to "trick" you.
- 🐾 Remember, the dog is evaluated for temperament, but also the handler is evaluated for care and control.
- 🐾 Practice introducing yourself, your dog, the program, and consenting to visit during the evaluation exercises. For example:

"My name is Alex, and this is my dog, Rocket. We are with the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program. Would you like a visit today?"

- 🐾 Practice validating statements and active listening. For example:

"It's understandable that you'd feel that way. I appreciate you sharing that with me."



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WATCH THE EVALUATION VIDEO

On YouTube by searching the title below, or clicking the hyperlink:

What to Expect at a St. John Ambulance Therapy
Dog Evaluation - YouTube



THANK YOU!

**We appreciate your interest in volunteering with
St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program.**

