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Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) Consent, Release and Waiver

Dr. Dizon incorporates her canine partner, Jethro, a black Labrador/golden retriever mix, in her psychotherapy work. Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal meeting specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. AAT can be utilized with various psychological, emotional, developmental, cognitive, motivational, or physical concerns.

Any fear of dogs should be reported *before* treatment begins in order for proper precautionary measures to be taken and appropriateness determined. Dr. Dizon must also be informed beforehand of any and all known allergies to dog fur/dander and food that you and/or your child may have. Dr. Dizon will then determine whether any arrangements may be made to accommodate the allergy or whether referrals would be appropriate.

Because Jethro is a live animal and an animal's behavior cannot always be predictable, it is important to discuss the policies and procedures in place to ensure your and your child's health and safety, along with Jethro's health and safety, and create as safe a working situation as possible.

Background: Jethro is a 3 year old Labrador/Golden Retriever mix. He is friendly, playful and affectionate. In September 2021, Dr. Dizon adopted Jethro from Canine Angels Service Teams, a service dog program for children with disabilities, where Jethro received extensive socialization and obedience training prior to being career changed. Since adoption, Jethro has passed the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen test, a program that is recognized as the gold standard for dog behavior, and has passed temperament evaluations with children, youth and adults. Dr. Dizon also has significant experience in the field of human-animal interaction. She has attained an Animals in Human Health Certificate from the Institute for Human-Animal Connection at the University of Denver. Dr. Dizon has also conducted research, published and lectured on the topic of animal-assisted interventions and the human-animal bond.

Potential Benefits of AAT: There are many benefits associated with working with animals in AAT which include:

Improved motivation and engagement in therapy	Increased focus, attention & impulse control
Rapport-building and increased trust	Can learn socio-emotional learning skills
Promotes a sense of security and emotional support	Increased problem-solving skills
Can learn frustration tolerance	Ability to assist in grief/loss issues
Increased self-confidence and self-esteem	Reduced anxiety and/or depression
Promotes relaxation (i.e when petting an animal, can help lower blood pressure/heart rate, and cortisol and increase oxytocin levels)	

Potential Risks of AAT:

Although there are many benefits to working with canines in a therapeutic setting, there are risks associated with this intervention.

- Dogs use their body to communicate. Jethro is a friendly and affectionate dog- during play and showing affection he may nibble, accidentally scratch, lick, brush against or lean into a person. Other body language such as tail wagging or body wiggling may also occur. Such behaviors create a risk for loss of balance, falling, or light bruising.
- While Jethro has been screened by a veterinarian before commencing work as a therapy animal, animals do sometimes carry disease(s). Because your contact is minimal, this risk is small. Jethro is up to date on all his vaccinations and receives routine and regular veterinary care. However, Dr. Dizon cannot eliminate all risk and we cannot foresee all potential problems that may occur.
- Dogs have their own natural defenses. While Dr. Dizon will do everything possible to prevent any injury, it is possible that someone may get scratched or bitten.
- Risk for an allergic reaction is present when working with dogs.

Therapy Dog Office Policies:

1. Animals have individual rights, just as each client has rights. Jethro is allowed to determine if & when he participates in sessions. While it may be planned to have him participate in session, he will never be forced to participate.
2. Jethro may be at Dr. Dizon’s office every day. Although a particular client may not be interacting with Jethro, he will still be present in her office.
3. Jethro wears a collar, harness, and short leash while in the therapy office.
4. Dog treats are, at times, utilized in sessions.
5. Jethro has his own quiet space (i.e., crate) in the office where he can rest, sleep or just take a quiet break. He should not be disturbed when he is in this area.
6. Jethro will always be treated gently. He should never be hit, have his tail or any other parts of his body pulled, carried or treated in any other way that is uncomfortable to him.
7. Jethro will always need Dr. Dizon present as his handler, in any therapeutic situation, and therefore, he will not be left alone with a client and/or their family.
8. If at any time, Jethro becomes irritated, scared or in any way acts in a negative manner, Dr. Dizon will put him in a safe place. No other person should touch him at these times.
9. Clients may not bring their own animal to also be involved in their therapy session.
10. In the event that Jethro accidentally scratches, nibble or otherwise causes any injury to a client or family member, Dr. Dizon will be *notified immediately* and respond accordingly.
11. Clients will wash their hands before and after handling Jethro.

Consent and Release:

While Dr. Dizon has listed some common risks, she cannot foresee all potential risks. By signing this form, you are stating your acceptance of the policies and risks outlined above & agree to release Dr. Dizon from any liability should any injury occur as part of your or your child’s participation in animal assisted therapy.

By signing below, I am agreeing that I have read, understood, and agree to the items contained in this document.

Printed Name of Client: _____

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Signature of Client/Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____