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**Behind the Line, Inc.**

**Therapy Dog Program**

**Handbook**

**2024**

Table of Contents

[WELCOME 4](#_Toc160699554)

[MISSION STATEMENT 4](#_Toc160699555)

[VISION STATEMENT 4](#_Toc160699556)

[CONTACT INFORMATION 4](#_Toc160699557)

[THERAPY DOG PROGRAM 4](#_Toc160699558)

[BTL’S EXPECTATIONS OF HANDLER AND DOG BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS 4](#_Toc160699559)

[LIABILITY INSURANCE AND TEAM INSURANCE 5](#_Toc160699560)

[THE IMPORTANCE OF CANINE STRESS AWARENESS 6](#_Toc160699561)

[Canine Stress 6](#_Toc160699562)

[Positive Canine Signals 6](#_Toc160699563)

[INTIAL SUITABILITY OF THE THERAPY DOG TEAM 6](#_Toc160699564)

[APPLICATION PROCESS 6](#_Toc160699565)

[TRAINING 7](#_Toc160699566)

[PREPERATION FOR TRAINING 7](#_Toc160699567)

[Training Supplies 7](#_Toc160699568)

[Dog Attire 7](#_Toc160699569)

[Handler Attire 7](#_Toc160699570)

[THERAPY PROGRAM TRAINING PROGRAM 8](#_Toc160699571)

[Training Orientation 8](#_Toc160699572)

[Types of Reinforcement and Training Overview 8](#_Toc160699573)

[Required Obedience Classes 9](#_Toc160699574)

[3 Month Evaluation 9](#_Toc160699575)

[Certification Test 9](#_Toc160699576)

[PET THERAPY TEAM POSITION DESCRIPTION 9](#_Toc160699577)

[Duties 10](#_Toc160699578)

[Qualifications 10](#_Toc160699579)

[Code of Ethics 10](#_Toc160699580)

[Code of Conduct 10](#_Toc160699581)

[ONGOING REQUIRED VACCINATIONS AND MEDICAL NEEDS 11](#_Toc160699582)

[VISITING WITH YOUR THERAPY DOG 11](#_Toc160699583)

[When Visiting Agencies or Participating in Events 11](#_Toc160699584)

[General Interactions 12](#_Toc160699585)

[When Interacting with Patients, Visitors, and Staff 12](#_Toc160699586)

[Observing Participants’ Experiences 12](#_Toc160699587)

[HEALTH & SAFETY 12](#_Toc160699588)

[Infection Control 12](#_Toc160699589)

[Incidents & Grievances 13](#_Toc160699590)

[Incident Procedure 13](#_Toc160699591)

[Grievance Procedure 14](#_Toc160699592)

[PATIENT PRIVACY 15](#_Toc160699593)

Behind the Line, Inc. Therapy Dog Program

# WELCOME

Welcome to the Behind the Line, Inc. (BTL) Therapy Dog Program! We hope you enjoy your time as a BTL volunteer! This handbook is designed to help you understand our Therapy Dog Program policies and expectations.

# MISSION STATEMENT

Behind the Line, Inc. is a non-profit corporation, dedicated to providing education and training

for public safety professionals, military veterans, and family members to mitigate the harmful effects of acute distress and accumulative stress. We are dedicated to assisting those who are exposed to traumatic events by increasing awareness, peer support training and education, resiliency education, and follow-up therapeutic referrals to licensed clinicians trained to understand the issues surrounding public safety careers.

# VISION STATEMENT

To build support, with available resources that are affordable and available to public safety community, military veterans, and their families.

# CONTACT INFORMATION

Executive Director: Heather Brown.

Email: [hbrownbtl@gmail.com](mailto:hbrownbtl@gmail.com) Phone Number: (443) 614-8682

General Information Website: <https://www.behindthelineinc.com>

# THERAPY DOG PROGRAM

Therapy dogs are naturally calm, friendly, and affectionate to strangers. They are also well-trained in basic obedience, and easily adaptable to novel noises, places, smells, and equipment. Situations our first responders and military veterans face can be a stressful for them and their families. Therapy dogs provide relief to those in anxiety-provoking situations, bring comfort and offer affectionate support.

Pet Therapy visits:

* Provide a diversion from the normal routines
* Promote a sense of play and humor
* Stimulate physical activity and social interaction
* Reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness

# BTL’S EXPECTATIONS OF HANDLER AND DOG BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

BTL has set specific expectations, behaviors and skills for the handler and dog. The purpose is to ensure the safety for the BTL, volunteer, dog, and community. The following provide an outline as to what will be asked and expected throughout the time you volunteer with BTL Therapy Dog Program.

1. Handlers will be encouraged to restrict use of heavy colognes or perfumes.
2. Dogs should be bathed and brushed prior to each training session and visit.
3. The handler is responsible to maintain the health of their dog by:
   1. Staying up to date with all vaccinations.
   2. Provide medication or treatments to maintain flee prevention as your dog may be around others and we want to prevent the spreading or flees.
   3. Maintain deworming regimen to safeguard your dog and others from harboring parasites.
   4. Maintain a healthy weight to prevent extra pressure on joints and for overall health.
4. Basic skills and behaviors required of the therapy dog:
   1. Basic Obedience
   2. Secure Attachment
   3. Calm Behavior in Public
   4. Focus
   5. Approachability and Acceptance of Touch
   6. Interest in Meeting New People
   7. Compatibility With Other Dogs
5. Handlers should develop and maintain the following skills:
   1. Demonstrate appropriate treatment of people and animals
   2. Demonstrate social skills (eye contact, smiles, confident posture, and conversations)
   3. Prepare for, conduct, and conclude a visit
   4. Respect and maintain confidentiality
   5. Act as the dog’s advocate during a visit, protecting and respecting the animal’s needs
   6. Effectively interpret the dog’s cues (i.e. stress, excitement) and respond accordingly.
6. The handler must juggle overseeing and managing their dog while meeting with others.

# LIABILITY INSURANCE AND TEAM INSURANCE

Behind the Line, Inc. maintains general liability insurance to protect the handler when volunteering services. Each team will be awarded a BTL patch that is to be warn during scheduled or authorized visits. If the team is not providing services for BTL, the handler is requested to remove the patch.

It is the handler’s responsibility to have additional liability insurance to further cover incidents that may occur. BTL’s incident reporting is described below.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF CANINE STRESS AWARENESS

To ensure the health of our dogs and the positive impact they can have when working with others, it is of great importance as the handler to monitor their levels of stress. Elevated levels of stress can create barriers to promoting optimized health.

## Canine Stress

Handlers will need to understand the potential signs of stress and how they can work with their dog to help ease the stress. These signs will be reviewed throughout training and instructions will be provided to help provide ideas to elevate the stress based on the signs. The following are signs to look for:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Panting | Turning Away | Pawing |
| Whimpering | Trembling | Yawning |
| Pacing | Lip Licking |  |

## Positive Canine Signals

Dogs will also show signs to let their handlers know that they are relaxed and calm. These include:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Wanting to interact with people. | Seems Settled | Open mouth with tongue out (not heavy panting) |
| Ears forward | Gently wagging tail | Leaning towards a person |
| Demonstrates a play bow |  |  |

# INTIAL SUITABILITY OF THE THERAPY DOG TEAM

There are many dogs who are suited to become a therapy dog. However, there is much work to be done and financial cost that come with this process. BTL wants to support the handler on this journey, but also needs to recognize the dedication that it will take. The follow provides an overview of questions to ask yourself prior to committing and moving forward with this program.

1. Does your schedule allow for participation in the program schedule through BTL?
2. Are you able to commit to practicing skills in-between training sessions?
3. Do you live within a reasonable geographic area that would all for easy access for agency visits?
4. Will you financially be able to provide for your dog and liability insurance?
5. If BTL were to expand working with children, handlers would be responsible for completing a background check.

# APPLICATION PROCESS

For individuals who are interested in participating and can fully commit to participate in the BTL Therapy Dog Program will follow these next steps:

* Contact BTL Executive Director to discuss interest to participate in the program.
* Complete the application and Waiver/Release form for the Therapy Dog Program.
* Schedule a time to meet with the Trainer to evaluate the dog.
* There will be a $50.00 non-refundable payment to US Kennels at the time of the evaluation.
* The trainer will evaluate the potential therapy dog and handler to determine the ability to participate in the program.
* The evaluation will be reviewed with BTL’s executive director to make a final decision in which the handler will receive within 48 hours.

# TRAINING

Trainer:

Email Phone Number:

Location:

# PREPERATION FOR TRAINING

Prior to the first day of training, the handler will need to be prepared. BTL requests that the handler and dog are prepared by attending training in proper attire and have the necessary supplies.

## Training Supplies

At each training session, the handler is expected to bring the following items:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Water and Water Bowl | Treats | Clicker if needed |
| Waste Bags | Brush | Hand sanitizer |
| Towel | Wet Wipe (optional) |  |

## Dog Attire

Your dog is expected to be ready to train in the proper gear recommended by the trainer which could include:

* Standard nylon or leather collar: During the initial phases of training, the trainer may recommend certain collars that will assist the handler and dog when working on specific behaviors.
* A leash that is six feet in length. Please do not use retractable or bungy cord leashes.
* A vest will be required as the handler and dog progress through training. Dogs will be required to wear vests when visiting and it is important for them to learn the difference between work and being off.

## Handler Attire

As they handler you will be an ambassador for BTL. When visiting BTL request that you follow a dress code. It is important to practice within this dress code, so things are not any different once you and your dog begin visiting agencies.

* Comfortable and flexible pants
  + Jeans without holes
  + Khaki paints
  + BDUs
* T-Shirt or Polo Shirt. BTL will provide each volunteer with a T-Shirt for volunteers to wear during visits.
* Closed toe shoes that provide stability and allow handlers to move quickly if needed.
  + Tennis Shoes
  + Flats with rubber soles
  + Loafers

# THERAPY PROGRAM TRAINING PROGRAM

The BTL Therapy Dog Training is expected to last up to six months. During this time, the therapy dog team will be provided training that will assist in the completion of AKC certifications. The trainer will record the progression of the therapy dog team during the training and apprise the executive director of any concerns or barriers.

## Training Orientation

The first training session will be the orientation to the training program. During this session, the trainer and executive director will review and have the handler sign the following:

1. BTL Therapy Dog Program Contract
2. US Kennels Dog Training Agreement
3. Animal Health Records Form
4. US Kennels Agreement/Waiver
5. US Kennel’s Limited License’s Release Waiver and Hold Harmless Agreement.
6. AKC Registration

The trainer will review the expectations of the therapy dog training program. They will review the skills that will be needed to become a therapy dog.

## Types of Reinforcement and Training Overview

**Reinforcement:** In training, reinforcement can be positive or negative. Reinforcement always supports or strengthens a behavior and increases the likelihood of it occurring.

**Positive reinforcement:** In training, “positive” means “added to.” If you give a dog a treat when he sits, you have added something reinforcing (the treat) to the outcome of the behavior.

**Negative reinforcement:** In training, “negative” means “removed from” or “taken away.”

**Desensitization:** The process of presenting a weak version of a problem stimulus at a level and duration that does not produce a negative reaction and gradually increasing the intensity as the dog’s comfort level grows.

**Extinction:** In operant conditioning, extinction refers to the elimination of a behavior that fails to produce desirable results. Ignoring a behavior such as pawing or jumping can lead to extinction of that behavior. Unlike the biological extinction of a species, however, an “extinct” behavior can reappear if it once again produces successful results.

**Jackpot:** Giving a large reward – lots of treats, tons of praise – when there is a breakthrough in training.

## Required Obedience Classes

**Puppy AKC:** The AKC S.T.A.R. Puppy program focuses on all the things every puppy and owner need to have a great start together. STAR stands for Socialization, Training, Activity, and a Responsible owner.

**Canine Good Citizen (CGC):** The Canine Good Citizen Program was designed by the American Kennel Club (AKC) to encourage dog owners to teach their dogs good manners. It also promotes responsible pet ownership. The test trains your dog to be well-behaved and calm in any situation.

**AKC Community Canine:** AKC Community Canine extends the skills learned in CGC to the community.

**AKC Urban CGC**: AKC Urban CGC requires that the dog demonstrate CGC skills and beyond in a setting that includes traffic, crowds, noises, smells, and other distractions that are present in a city or town.

The handler and dog will need to pass the test at the end of each obedience class. Copies of the certificates should be provided to BTL’s Executive Director to maintain in volunteer’s file.

## 3 Month Evaluation

The trainer, handler, and BTL executive director will schedule a meeting to review how the team is progressing during training. The trainer will discuss the strengths of the team and areas that need improvement. Based on this evaluation, the trainer and executive director may suggest that the training be discontinued if there are too many barriers or lack of progression.

## Certification Test

Once the team has successfully passed all required trainings, they will be expected to complete the final Certification Test. The team has up to three times to pass to be considered a therapy dog team under Behind the Line, Inc. The handler can then submit documentation to the AKC for further certifications titles.

# PET THERAPY TEAM POSITION DESCRIPTION

**Purpose:** Under the direction of BTL’s executive director, you and your certified therapy dog will participate in onsite visits for approved first responder agencies and events. If we were to experience a critical incident, your services may be requested. You are not obligated to attend as this may not be a planned event.

## Duties

As a representative for BTL’s Therapy Dog Program, there are specific duties and limitations of this position. These duties are:

* Ensure interaction with the therapy dog is in a safe and in a controlled environment.
* Check in at the front desk and request your point of contact. This information will be provided to you by BTL Executive Director.
* To assist in limiting the spread of germs and viruses, wash your hand frequently and/or carry hand sanitizer.
* Practice “good” safety techniques.
* Turn in copies of dog’s registration and vaccination records as requested.
* Do not visit in restricted units unless specifically asked.
* Maintain the privacy of those you visit.

## Qualifications

To be accepted as a volunteer within BTL’s Therapy Dog Program, the following requirements will need to be met:

* Must be in good standing with certifying organization.
* Documentation of ongoing training.
* Vaccination document must be provided to BTL’s Executive Director.
* Friendly, outgoing
* Organized, able to work independently
* Comfortable interacting with a wide variety of people
* Your therapy dog must be certified through U.S. Kennels

**BTL requires that therapy dog teams be re-evaluated every two years**. Documentation will be provided to BTL’s Executive Director.

## Code of Ethics

1. Perform duties that are consistent with your position and training.
2. Abide by the professional ethics of your profession and organizations.
3. Demonstrate a belief in and attitude of reverence for all life.
4. At all times, treat all animals, all people, and the environment with respect, dignity, and sensitivity, maintain the quality of life and experience for all who are involved.
5. Be informed and educated about the aspects and issues that are related to those you are visiting and supporting.
6. Comply with all local, state, and federal laws and BTL polices.

## Code of Conduct

1. Serve as an ambassador for BTL by upholding its mission and vision.
2. Monitor canine health and welfare before, during, and after sit visits.
3. Honor BTL team commitment to attend scheduled sessions and provide amble notification when needing to cancel the visitation.
4. Establish parameters for behaviors and set up safeguards for the well-being of those participating in the session.
5. Participate in ongoing professional development opportunities when offered to enhance the skills of your team.
6. Maintain open communication with BTL and report safety incidents arising during a visit.
7. Maintain privacy and confidentiality.
8. Abide by all rules of BTL, agencies who you visit, and all local, state, and federal laws.
9. Reframe from using drugs or alcohol while volunteering.
10. Ensure the safety and care for your dog.

# ONGOING REQUIRED VACCINATIONS AND MEDICAL NEEDS

Each dog is required to meet BTL’s health and vaccination requirements including, but not limited to:

* Verification of current inoculations for: Rabies (1 or 3 years), DHPP (Distemper, Hepatitis, Parvovirus, Par influenza),
* Results of annual heartworm test
* Verification of negative stool exam for parasites
* Dogs are to be deemed by a veterinarian to be in good physical and mental health and free of contagious disease.
* If your dog requires medication or medical treatment, please submit documentation from your veterinarian that your dog is cleared before visiting an agency or participating in an event.

# VISITING WITH YOUR THERAPY DOG

Please walk your dog prior to entering the building to reduce the chance of toileting accidents. It is recommended that you carry a cross body bag, or fanny pack to keep necessary supplies, like cleaning wipes. If your dog has an accident, please notify housekeeping immediately for additional cleanup.

### When Visiting Agencies or Participating in Events

* Check doors for precaution signs- don’t enter.
* Knock on door before entering room.
* Stop in doorway of room, explain you have a therapy dog with you and wait to be invited in.
* Obtain permission from all individuals in the room before entering.
* If an individual does not want a dog visit, smile, and move. Do not try to talk them into a visit with your dog.
* Do not visit with individuals while they are eating or drinking.
* Follow the rules set forth by the agency such as mask requirements.

### General Interactions

You are always responsible for your dog’s behavior. The follow behavior is expected of your dog:

* Refrain from interacting with other dogs
* Only interact with individuals after you provide them permission
* Dog remains calm and approachable
* Dog remains on leash and leash is in your hand at all time
* Dog’s paws always remain on the floor

### When Interacting with Patients, Visitors, and Staff

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Smile and say “Hello” | Use a friendly tone | Make eye contact |
| Introduce yourself | Introduce your dog | Breed, age, name |
| Training they’ve had | Tricks and cute quirks |  |

### Observing Participants’ Experiences

* Be aware of body cues and body language and terminate your visit when appropriate.
* Leave quickly and appropriately if an individual becomes upset, frightened, or unhappy.
* Use appropriate conversation, questions, and humor.
* Respect directions from the individuals and/or staff
* Guide the individuals as to how to interact with your dog by:
  + lifting the dog up to the patient’s eye level,
  + teaching the patient how your dog likes to be petted, etc.
* Ask permission before moving furniture to allow easier access for the dog. Replace the furniture at the end of your visit.
* Watch for patient being too “rough” on your dog. Stop the activity immediately and show the patient how the dog likes to be petted or leave the room if the activity continues.

# HEALTH & SAFETY

As the handler, you are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of your canine. It is your responsibility to ensure that it remains in good health, feed properly, and is groomed. As stated within the BTL Release/Waiver, BTL is held harmless in the event of an incident that occurs while training or volunteering. Procedures are listed below to assist with infection control and reporting incidents.

## Infection Control

The following infection and safety measures are for the protection of the patient, your dog, and you. You must follow these guidelines every time you volunteer with your dog to help reduce the spread of infection.

* Your dog is clean and well-groomed for visiting. This includes being bathed (wet or dry bath) 24 hours or less before your visit, being brushed, nails trimmed, ears clean and free of odor, eyes and teeth cleaned.
* Carry sanitizing gel with you while volunteering.
* Offer the gel to anyone who pets your dog and use it as required on your own hands.

Wash your hands or use the hand sanitizer:

* Before and after you visit
* After using the restroom
* After sneezing and coughing

Do not visit with your dog starting from onset of and until at least one week beyond the resolution of:

* Episodes of vomiting or diarrhea
* Urinary or fecal incontinence
* Episodes of sneezing or coughing of unknown or suspected infectious origin
* Treatment with non-topical antimicrobials or any immunosuppressive doses of medications
* Open wounds
* Fleas, ticks, or mange (may return when veterinarian determines animal to be clear)
* Ear infections
* Skin infections or “hot spots”
* Orthopedic or other conditions that, in the opinion of your veterinarian, could result in pain or distress to the dog during handling and/or when maneuvering within the facility
* Is in heat
* Is recovering from surgery.

# Incidents & Grievances

It is the responsibility of the handler to ensure all incidents or negative interactions are communicated with the Executive Director. Documentation will be required to be presented regarding specific incidents that may occur while visiting. Members and non-members also could file a grievance. Each situation will be provided to the Board President who will assign a committee to fully review and make a final determination regarding the outcome and further participation on the team.

## Incident Procedure

In the event of an injury (scratch, bite, or any other inappropriate animal behavior) or other adverse incident:

* End your visit and leave the room
* Report scratch, bite, or other injury to BTL Executive Director and point of contact at the agency.
* In the case of accidental scratches, the situation will be reviewed, and appropriate measures will be taken to prevent similar injuries from occurring again
* In the case of bites, intentional scratches or other serious, inappropriate behavior, the animal’s visiting rights will immediately be withdrawn
* Complete BTL incident reports and provide a copy to BTL Executive Director

## Grievance Procedure

Any member or non-member may file a complaint against a Behind the Line, inc. Therapy Dog Program member including officers, board members, and Tester/Observers. Further, it is a member’s duty to report violations of Behind the Line, Inc. rules. Failure to report an incident to the office may lead to membership termination.  
  
Reasons for reporting violations may include but are not limited to:  
- Alleged misconduct  
- Improper or unsafe handling and/or dog behavior  
- Violations of Alliance of Therapy Dogs Rules and Regulations, Code of Ethics, or Policies, By-Laws.  
  
All formal reports or complaints should be submitted in writing to Behind the Line, Inc. within two weeks of the event. All reports are taken seriously and will result in a formal investigation. Action taken by the Grievance and Ethics (G&E) Committee could range from no fault found to issuance of a warning, probation, suspension, or even termination of membership.  
  
After receiving the information, the Board President assign a committee to review the complaint. The appropriate committee will contact the parties involved to inform them that a formal complaint has been filed, to give the reasons for the complaint and to advise them that an investigation will begin. Membership privileges will be suspended until resolution of the complaint.

If the committee finds the complaint is unwarranted, the chair will inform the complainant with the reasons that the issue will not be pursued. If the committee finds the complaint warranted, the chair or designated committee member will contact the parties involved informing them that the committee has reached a final decision. All information collected by the committee will remain confidential. The complainant will be informed when the committee has reached its final decision, but each final decision will remain between the committee and the individual named in the complaint.

**Confidentiality:** BTL does not accept anonymous complaints. However, it is the intent of the Board of Directors, including the office staff of BTL, to keep any complaint information provided to BTL confidential. Be aware, depending on the amount of information released, the identity of the complainant may be reasonably ascertained.  
  
Behind the Line, Inc. Therapy Dog Program will not pursue any complaint involving personality clashes or conflicts within local groups.

# PATIENT PRIVACY

Patients have a right to privacy and volunteers (as well as staff) must respect that right. Information you hear or receive while visiting must be kept confidential. Patients may ask to have their picture taken with you and your dog. You may take a picture of the patient with their phone or camera (if you feel comfortable doing so). However, you cannot take pictures on your phone or camera