



Velma Pets As Therapy Training School

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Enriching the lives of people and pets through education,
bringing them together safely and beneficially

The most powerful
antidepressant has
4 paws, fur and
a wagging tail.



Residents and their Dogs – OH&S, Infection Control and Safety Considerations

Health and temperament checks

Prior to the dog being admitted to a residence, village, group home or other aged care setting, a basic health and temperament assessment makes sense, for the sake of others living in the same location and for the animal. Please see the document 'Residential Dog Veterinarian Health, Temperament and Obedience Screening'. Once the dog's health and temperament are assessed a management plan can be written.

What is a suitable pet?

I'm often asked for the best size, breed or age of dog that would be most suitable for a residential pet in a residential village, nursing home or group home. Small dogs are considered to be the best but large dogs are equally as suitable. Some large dogs can be more balanced and easily managed than smaller breeds.

I would suggest the age, breed or size of dog is largely irrelevant. The rapport between the resident and the dog is the most important factor. If the resident's life is improved by having a constant companion, it is possible most residents would benefit from this. Even those who don't want to interact with dogs usually get enjoyment from watching others who do. The rest is simply a matter of training and management for the pet, the owner and the staff.

Everyone can benefit from having a dog at the location. The benefits of constant interaction from a dog are well researched and documented and proven to increase the mental, emotional and physical health and well being of all whom come into contact with the pet.

What should happen when the pet dies?

Some locations allow residents to keep pets until the pet dies. People who are attached to their pet consider their pet to be an important family member. Some people even love their pets more than family members! When the pet dies the emotions are exactly the same as if their child died. This results in deep depression and grief which lowers the immune system and can cause negative health issues to arise. I strongly believe that the best way forward for a grieving person is to get another pet. A new pet is known to alleviate even the deepest of depressions due to grief.

Pet management officer

Where ever there are pets living in a residential village, nursing home or group home, there should be a suitably trained 'pet management officer.' It is essential that this person is fully trained in this role for safety, OH&S, legal and insurance reasons. We have a 'Residential Pets E-course' available which includes the training process of the 'pet management officer.' E-courses are taken on computer therefore this e-course is available nationally and internationally.

The entire success and full benefits of residential pets relies on the correct and full training skills of the 'pet management officer.' This can be a paid position or volunteer role. Volunteers can be trained to professional standards. Selection is crucial and this is included in our 'Residential Pets E-course.' In Australia, volunteers hold essential roles in aged and health care. Volunteers when well trained and managed, are a true asset. Apart from the costs of training and uniforms volunteers are financially viable for locations operating on a strict budget.

A daily, weekly and monthly checklist is required to ensure OH&S, insurance and legal issues do not arise; also for the full mental and emotional benefits to be obtained by the dog's owner. Pets should be checked daily by a 'pet management officer' to ensure the health and safety of the dog is being catered for and that the dog is not causing a nuisance to other residents.

Use of a daily, weekly, monthly check list is advised with records being kept on file for any necessary future reference. If the resident is elderly, on medication or a little absent minded they can forget about basic care essentials for their pet. Examples of 'pet management officer' checklists are included in the 'Residential Pets E-course.'

Pets other than dogs

A pet program should be written for all residential pets regardless of breeds. The most popular residential pets apart from dogs are cats, birds, rabbits and guinea pigs. These are discussed in our 'Residential Pets E-course.'

When interacting with our beloved pet, chemicals are released from the brain which lower pain and stress levels and help towards maintaining morale.



Pets benefit everyone, including the staff by increasing morale and lowering stress levels.



Collar, car safety harness and identity tag



The dog should permanently wear a suitably sized collar, not too tight with an identity tag including the owner's phone number and address.

Travel

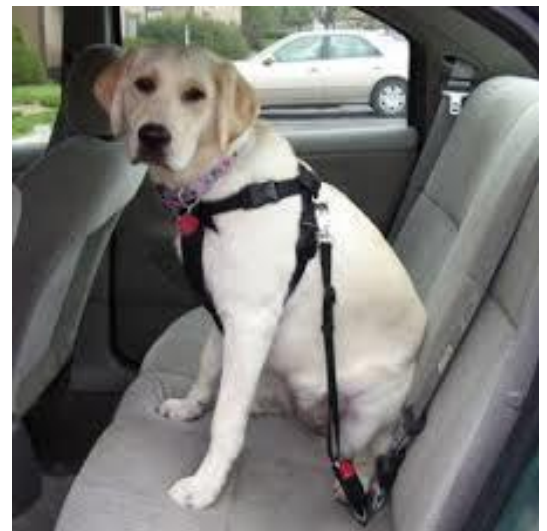
When in a vehicle, dogs should wear a car seat belt body harness and locked into a seat belt. This is for the safety of the dog (in the event of an emergency stop) plus the safety of the driver to prevent the dog from climbing on and/or distracting the driver. It is easy to teach a dog to be locked into a seat belt. This is essential because people other than the dog's owner may be required to take the dog to a veterinarian or groomer.

Training for such is in our 'Residential Pets E-course.'

Vet consultations

Note the dog's veterinarian on file in the event of an emergency. Who can take the dog to veterinarian consultations? Can the owner? Or will another person be required to do this? If so, have that person's name on file in the event of an emergency.

Possibly arrange with a local vet to give house calls.



Picking up the dog to place in a car or on something - chair, bed, grooming table

Who will pick up the dog? Can the owner do this? There are a lot of people with bad backs so if the owner is not capable of lifting the dog into a car, in the event of an emergency, keep a list of names on file who can. There is a specific safe way to pick up a dog. Never like a baby under their front arms. This can hurt some dogs. The person should bend their knees not arch their back. Pick up a dog by scooping up the dog's rear end and having it rest on your arm and around the dog's chest. Ensure that all OH&S protocols are followed for "picking up" something.



Water

The pet management officer is to check that fresh and clean water is permanently available and in a place where the resident or residents will not accidentally trip over it, or kick it.

Medication

Any medication notes should be kept on file. The pet management officer should ensure that the dog receives their annual C5 vaccination, worming and flea programs plus any other medications.

Dog food, treats and nutrition

Is the dog on a special diet? If so, this should be noted on file in the event the owner is suddenly unavailable to discuss this. Can the owner purchase the dog food? If not, who will do that? Dogs require a nutritionally balanced diet as we do. Permanently feeding dogs pre-packaged or canned dog food is like us permanently eating MacDonalDs. A healthy well balanced diet should be agreed with the owner and noted on the dog's file. The pet management officer needs to ensure the dog is receiving a good and healthy diet.

A nutritionally balanced dog diet is listed in our 'Residential Pet E-course.'

A non healthy diet is known to cause certain illnesses.

One of the biggest issues with dogs living around a lot of people is that people love feeding dogs! Oxytocin is released from the brain when we feed a friendly dog and that feels good! Therefore, without supervision dogs could be fed over the volume required for their body size. Plus they can be fed an assortment of very bad foods such as chocolate that can make the dog sick or even seriously ill. Supervision is the key here.

Walks

Walking dogs keeps them and us healthy. All dogs should be required to be walked unless the dog is not physically able to do so. Will the owner do this? Or will this be assigned to the 'pet management officer?' Dogs love to sniff their environment. For a dog this is the same as us reading our local newspaper. The odours are interesting, educational and fun for the dog so "sniffing time" should always be allowed. The length of walk required would depend on the age and breed of the dog. Dog walking is an excellent exercise for both the dog and the resident and should be fully encouraged.



Poop scooping, designated toileting area and outside access

Dogs need to have access to a toileting area immediately they awake, every few hours and immediately after eating. Older dogs can become a little incontinent and can't "hold" on. Therefore, these dogs need more frequent access to a toileting area. Is the owner capable of offering this? Is there a doggy door to a fenced off area? If not, can this be arranged? Or does someone need to walk the dog to the toileting area? Accidents will happen inside the owner's home if the dog can't get out to toilet when they need to. Is the toileting of the dog to be a requirement of the 'pet management officer?' Is the dog owner able to bend down and scoop the poop? Where is the poop to be deposited? Who supplies the poop bags? All issues to be included on the dog's daily checklist.



Place your hand inside a plastic bag



Tie up the top of the bag and dispose in a designated area

Running

Unless the dog is aged and medically incapable of running, all dogs love to run. Running releases endorphins in their brain that makes them feel balanced and good. Can the owner do this? Or is this a task for the pet management officer. Which areas can the dog run in that will not cause other residents risk? The dog should have the opportunity to run every day. The length of time will depend on the age and breed of dog. Research the breed and the details will advise on how much running exercise is required or ask a dog trainer.



Playing

Dogs love to play. As with running, this releases "feel good" endorphins. Can the owner do this? Will the pet management officer be assigned to this task?

Training

The dog should at least know basic obedience such as sit, stay and stop barking on command. Does the dog know these? If not, for ease of the dog's management, can the owner take the dog to a local dog training group? If not, can a trainer attend the location to train the dog? Or will the pet management officer have to assist with this?

Behavioural issues

If the dog has or develops behavioural issues can the owner manage these? If not, can a qualified dog trainer attend the location? Will the pet management officer have to assist with this?

Barking and nuisance barking



Barking is the major complaint from neighbours where dogs are living, regarding the disturbance of peace. Is this dog a barker? If so, has the dog been taught the “stop barking” command? Can the owner stop the dog from barking? All dogs of any age or breed can learn the stop barking command. Yes, an old dog can be trained! If the dog barks when left alone, can the dog be left with a friendly dog-loving neighbour when the owner is out? I’d guarantee there would be lots of residents living close by who would love the opportunity of dog sitting whilst the owner is out and about. A list of these dog lovers should be kept on the dog’s file in the event of an emergency.

Toys

Dogs love playing with toys and most loved dogs have a huge amount of these. Can the owner ensure these are kept clean and not left in an area where other residents may trip on them? Or is this a task for the pet management officer?

Ball games

Most dogs love ball games plus it is also fun and good exercise for the owner to be out throwing and picking up the ball. Which location is safe for this, where the dog will not accidentally run into another resident? Can the owner play ball games or is this a task for the pet management officer?



Dog bedding

Dog bedding should be washed at least once per 7 days, more if the dog is prone to incontinence. Who will wash the bedding? Can the owner do this? If so, where can the bedding be hung for drying? Or is this a task for the pet management officer?

Dog sitting

The owner will need to go out from time to time without taking the dog. Keep a list of dog lovers nearby who would love the opportunity to dog sit. Leaving the dog on his or her own should be avoided where at all possible as distressed dogs will bark or display destructive behaviour.

Grooming

Depending on the breed, the dog may need to be brushed and combed daily or weekly. Generally, most companion dogs are fluffy and require daily brushing and combing. All companion dogs should be washed at least every second week, and some once a week. Where can the dog be washed and brushed? Can the owner do this? Or is this a task for the pet management officer? If the dog is long haired they will need professional grooming on a regular basis. Can a local groomer come to the location to do this?

Health and coat checks

Dogs require a daily health and coat check in order to catch any potential health issue in the early stages. The coat should be examined for fleas and ticks. All orifices should be checked for cleanliness and any discharge which may be a health issue. The dog's body and paws should be checked for any injuries, cuts or unusual lumps and bumps. This should be carried out once a day. Can the owner do this? Or is this a task for the 'pet management officer?'

Nails trimmed

Dogs nails should never touch the ground when they are walking. If they do, it means they are too long and could be causing the dog discomfort or even pain. Over long periods, if a dog is walking on long nails it can cause injury to their paws and legs. The length should be checked at least once per week. Can the owner check this? Can the owner trim the dog's nails? Is this a task for the 'pet management officer?' Trimming dog nails is a highly skilled action and should only be assigned to a trained groomer or a person with significant experience. If cut too short, the nails bleed profusely and is very painful for the dog.



Infection control

When a large number of people are living together there is always an issue with cross contamination. Dog paws and coats can carry contamination. It is good practice to regularly use anti-bacterial wipes on the dog's paws if the dog has walked in a possibly contaminated area. Wiping the dog's coat with anti-bacterial wipes is also recommended if the dog has interacted with people in a contaminated area. It is always best practice for all who touch the dog to wash their hands with anti-bacterial wipes immediately after touching the dog, picking up the dog or having the dog on their lap.

Dog interaction with other residents

Dogs are a magnet for animal lovers and there will be many living in the same location without the benefits of their own dog. Staff may be tempted to “borrow” the dog from the dog’s owner to take to other residents for interaction. Or, the owner themselves may take the dog to meet other residents. Please see hand out ‘Accidents and Injuries That Can Occur Without Correct Training and/or a Pet Program’. It is a good idea to have a few training sessions with the dog’s owner and the residents who would love to dog sit or have the opportunity for regular interaction, with the dog owner’s permission of course. All should receive basic training in the issues mentioned in the above hand out. If possible, have an experienced ‘pets as therapy’ expert give the training or workshop. This is listed in the ‘Residential Pets E-course.’ Dogs are unpredictable as all animals are. Frail, aged and challenged adults and children can also be unpredictable; consequently having some basic dog interaction rules in place can reduce the risk of any accidental injuries. Note on file all the residents interested in dog sitting when the owner is out or away from home. Preferably the dog should not be left alone if at all possible.



Keeping pets happy and safe keeps residents happy and safe too.