



How to Become a Junior Handler

Want to be a therapy dog handler? You and your dog will work as a team to bring a little joy and smiles to many people who may just need a little lift. So how do you get started?

- A junior handler must be 12 to 17 years old. (Parent involvement is required, so please talk with your parents first.)
- Your dog must be at least 1 year old and can be any breed or mixed breed. (Wolf or coyote mixes are not allowed.)
- You must either own or have a close relationship with your dog for at least 6 months before testing.
- Your dog must be healthy. A wellness exam, negative fecal test, and current rabies vaccine/titer are required.
- Your dog must have a good and calm temperament.

There is no cost for you and your dog to go through the evaluation process with an ATD Tester/Observer. Please check our website for a Tester/Observer near you.

What Makes a Good Therapy Dog?

We look for well-mannered, well-behaved dogs that enjoy meeting people. ATD doesn't require formal training, certifications, or tests other than our own. ATD is open to register any breed of dog except wolf or coyote mixes because the rabies vaccination is not proven to be effective with those breeds.

- A dog at least 1 year old;
- A dog with a calm and gentle disposition; and
- A dog that is attentive to its handler

About Alliance of Therapy Dogs

We are a volunteer organization of dedicated therapy dog handlers and their dogs on a mission of sharing smiles and joy. ATD's goal is to provide testing, certification, registration, support, and insurance for members who are involved in volunteer animal-assisted activities. These activities include, but aren't limited to, visits to hospitals, special needs centers, schools, nursing homes, and airports. Our objective is to form a network of caring individuals and their special dogs who share smiles and joy with people, young and old alike.

ALLIANCE OF THERAPY DOGS

(307) 432-0272 | (877) 843-7364

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Alliance of Therapy Dogs Junior Handlers



Have you ever considered volunteering with your dog?

Volunteering with a therapy dog is a fun and meaningful way to give back to your community. It is a different type of volunteering that reaches out to people of all ages who are unable to have their dog with them or can no longer have a dog due to life changes.

Do you have goals to meet? Volunteering with your dog can help you meet them.

- 4-H Dog Project or Leadership
- FFA (Future Farmers of America)
- Scout Badge Work
- Church Youth Volunteering
- Community Volunteer Hours

Kai & Callie

Paso Robles, CA



Everything I've done with Callie through ATD has been such a great experience. But one of my favorites is when we were testing. We were at the park and visited some young kids that were playing. It

was so life-giving to see the looks on the kids' faces when they saw the dogs give them a high five or twirl in a circle. I loved watching my dog's reaction to it and how fun it was for her to do something new for someone. It was so special to see how much of an impact we made on these young lives.

Ashlyn & Piper

Pendergast, GA

I first became interested in becoming a therapy dog team because I believed my dog had the most wonderful personality for therapy visits, and I wanted to serve my community. She needed a job, and bringing joy to people's lives with her was a great way to accomplish both.



Chris & Baby

Cheyenne, WY



I started as a junior handler as a volunteer opportunity for Boy Scouts, but quickly therapy dogs eclipsed Boy Scouts. It was clear to me that our weekly visits heartened the patients in a way that was so meaningful to both them and me. On top of that, the therapy dog teams were an interesting and dedicated group of people and dogs to get to know!

Caytlin & Ruby

Santa Maria, CA

I wanted to become a handler because I love working with dogs and people. The patients' or students' faces light up when you enter the room. I have always loved dogs so much and loved the therapy dog visits at my school. I wanted to be a part of something using my dog to bring joy to these people as my dog brings joy to me.



Lexi & Tahoe

Paso Robles, CA

I became a handler because I have seen how happy people are when they get to interact with dogs or just even see the dog. I have organized routine visits at my greatgrandma's assisted living home and the people light up every time we come. Many of them have great memories of when they had dogs or animals back when they were kids.



Jordan, Devin & Legend

Ypsilanti, MI (cover photo)

We have more than eight years combined as junior handlers of two collies.

What's amazing about being an ATD junior handler is the reaction of those in the community seeing young people volunteering. Individuals cherish the time with our therapy dog, Legend, but they always comment about how appreciative they are seeing teens giving back to the community. In addition, the confidence that you'll gain from speaking to people is invaluable. Plus, you're an advocate for pet responsibility, as your presence with a well-behaved dog motivates people young and old to spend quality time and to properly train their own dogs.