

## **Skills of Autism Service Dogs in a School Setting**

### **Behavioral Modification**

1. Take child to quiet area (time away) and let the child engage in repetitive motion with the dog such as brushing
2. Encourage child into appropriate/calm behavior by using the dog as a “roll model”
3. Gross Motor stimulation to enhance learning in hyperactive children such as walking the dog around the room or down the hall. Brushing the dog. Feeding treats.
4. Use the dog as example of skill being reviewed, similar to using doll therapy (see the doll sit, why don't you sit too) only use the dog as an example.
5. Talk through the dog to the child which will be less intimidating and less processing for the child. (Jesse's wants you to stand in line next to him quietly, will you stand with Jesse)
6. Use the dog as a calming technique during long activities. (have child lay on, with, or under dog during carpet time)
7. Use dog similar to weighted vest in deep pressure therapy.
8. While canine is attached to child the dog is used as a position anchor, such as keeping child in a chair.

### **Self Stemming**

1. Redirect self-stemming behavior by gross motor interruption such as patting dog or grooming him

### **Speech**

1. Autistic children find it very intimidating and overwhelming to speak to adults. The delay in their attempt vs. our attempt at understanding is an extreme obstacle. Service dogs are extremely accurate at noting extremely subtle body changes and the needs of their disabled partner. Educators may use this bond to enhance speech by having the child gesture and command the dog and the immediate positive response of the dog and the dog's correct understanding of the child's desire is an extremely positive motivator to encourage the child to try speech again and again.

### **Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)**

1. People's lives are made up of numerous routines (morning routine of hygiene, eating, etc.) Using a small routine with the service animal will help develop that concept in the autistic. (walking to treat bag, taking treat, asking dog to sit, giving the treat, positive reinforcement of dog wagging tail and excitement for treat)

### **Eye Contact and Object Identification**

1. Pointing to dog (who's this?), (who's dog is this), (give Jesse a kiss), (where's Jesse's nose)

### **Runway Prevention**

1. Autistic dogs are trained to prevent the child and or retrieve the child during a running episode.

### **Advanced Autistic Skills for Their Service Animals**

#### **Reading**

1. Have child read to the dog

#### **Routine**

- 1 Have child complete multi-step routines for the dog (grooming, feeding etc.)

### **Typical Tasks in an Educational Setting:**

Tasks can be customized to meet the needs of the students and facility.

- The Facility Dog can be used as part of the reward system for good behavior and may be a powerful motivator for students to reach specific goals. Rewards can include special time with the dog, either interactive play (ball tossing) or quiet time.
- When reading aloud to a dog, children are often less inhibited and read more clearly. Research has shown that reading to a dog can help improve reading ability. After all, the dog won't correct or interrupt!
- In the classroom, students can learn safe ways of interacting with an unfamiliar dog. Getting to know a well trained Facility Dog helps children overcome fears and achieve more confidence around dogs.
- Students can learn how to teach new commands to the Facility Dog. This accomplishment gives them confidence and improved self-esteem while enhancing their understanding and appreciation of animals,
- By learning positive ways to interact with a dog, students develop improved social skills with both peers and adults. Activities include walking the dog, giving the dog basic commands, and rewarding the dog with praise.
- Individual counseling sessions may be enhanced through the use of a Facility Dog who listens quietly as the child shares secrets too difficult to tell an adult. Research studies have shown that children display noticeable progress in both therapeutic and skills development through the involvement of dogs during therapy.

## Overall Support

- Promoting a general feeling of wellbeing (children, elderly, general hospital admits)
- Providing unconditional affection to those who lack it (persons in prisons and shelters, especially domestic-abuse shelters)
- Improving focus (Alzheimers patients and persons suffering from clinical depression)
- Interacting with those who have difficulty communicating (nonverbal clients; some psychiatric inpatients; persons with a range of associative disorders)
- Stimulating memory functions (especially in Alzheimers patients)
- Encouraging and aiding speech functions (e.g., in stroke patients)  
Note that all the activities above rely on a combination of touching, talking about, etc., in most of which the dog does not have to "do" very much except act friendly and be willing to be handled a lot.
- Motivating simple physical activities for the mobility impaired (e.g., patting, brushing ,etc.)
- Providing practice for specific Physical Therapy functions (throwing ball, offering tidbits, etc.) In these cases, the dog may perform much more specific tasks, or at least may need more specific equipment. We are now attempting to locate horse-type brushes (the oval flat kind with a strap across the back) for patients who have difficulty uncurling their fingers. We also have a Hula Hoop, with which both the dog and some of the patients can practice specific movements.
- Modeling perseverance (many Therapy Dogs have been through terrible times -- patients often find it comforting that the Therapy Dog has not only survived these but have become useful to others).-- NorthStar.org