



# STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Pet Therapy Team Evaluation Handbook



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# PAWS Standards of Excellence

**PAWS Standards of Excellence (STEX)** is an evaluation tool that takes the team - both the pet and the handler - into consideration when evaluating for appropriate behavior and aptitude for many types of pet-assisted visiting.

STEX assesses the behavior of the therapy pet and the competence of the team as a unit:

- noting whether the handler is proactive in management of the pet
- noting whether the pet is under the handler's control and reliable in its behavior, and
- noting whether there is steady, positive communication between handler and pet.

## **THE TEST**

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In order to achieve a PAWS Standards of Excellence title, pet teams must pass all four sections of the STEX evaluation.

### **1. BEHAVIOR AND DEMEANOR**

As is true during a regular visit, you will be expected to exhibit not only good control over your pet, but also a good working relationship that reveals an attentive pet and a kind owner for the entire time you are present for this test – as you enter the testing area and while checking in. We are looking for appropriate behavior in the following situations: entering/exiting the building and the testing area, general appearance of both pet and handler, during transitions and waiting, and during interactions with other pets and people.

### **2. PET & TEAM ASSESSMENT**

In this section, we are evaluating your pet's responsiveness to your commands and your working relationship. Several of the behaviors in this section replicate behaviors required by the American Kennel Club's Canine good Citizen test. However there are some differences:

- STEX does not require the CGC's 10<sup>th</sup> target behavior, *Supervised Separation*
- For the STEX evaluation, appropriate adjustments/deletions have been made for dogs that are under 5 pounds and small animals such as cats, rabbits, and other small pets.
- Adjustments may also be made for either a disabled pet or a disabled handler.
- If you are interested in having your dog achieve his CGC title, all 10 behaviors must be exhibited. Pre-registration for the CGC test is required.

### **3. WALKING THROUGH A CROWD**

The second 6 behaviors evaluated by the STEX target team competence and confidence when exposed to noises and distractions that may occur during a visit. We are looking for a calm pet and a reassuring handler.

### **4. 3 MINUTE PRACTICE VISIT**

The final phase of the STEX evaluates your skills during a 3 minute practice visit. Your pet is expected to be friendly and interested in the visitee. The handler is expected to perform the 2 step-approach, a visitee-directed visit, and an appropriate close, as well as treat the visitee in a friendly, engaging manner.

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## SCORING

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Each target behavior is scored using the following rubric:

**Not Ready for Visiting** – the team cannot successfully pass parts of the test. *We encourage these teams to practice and try the test again.*

**Basic** – team demonstrates competence and aptitude for visiting in most visiting situations; however, some assistance and cues are needed. Appropriate responses are made within the first 3 tries.

(Basic level is required for some of our less challenging, specialized visiting.)

**Intermediate** - team carries out behaviors with competence and accuracy on first try, however the precision required for the Advanced level is missing.

(Intermediate level allows teams to visit in some of the more demanding sites.)

**Advanced** – team demonstrates competence, confidence, and precision in all areas of the test. Both handler and pet work together well as a team and do not need assistance to accomplish specified tasks. Behaviors are carried out on the first try.

(Advanced level is required for hospital visiting, PAWS for Reading, and most other child-centered visits.)

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## TRAITS WE'RE LOOKING FOR IN OUR THERAPY TEAMS

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### HUMAN

Friendly personality  
Interested in people  
Advocate for the pet  
Aware of space/activity around them  
Control pet without harshness/force  
Relaxed and confident  
Reveal good working relationship **with pet**

### PET

Friendly and gentle behavior  
Interested in people  
**Reliably well-behaved**  
**Predictable reactions appropriate** to situation  
Demonstrate that behavior is under control of handler at all times

## REGULATIONS/REQUIREMENTS

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- **All teams must be evaluated every 2 years**
- **Dogs under 18 months must be evaluated every 6 months**
- **Teen Members (11-18) may STEX and subsequently handle the pet during visits.**
- **Junior Members (10 and younger) must wait till age 11 before handling the pet.**
  
- The following are **acceptable/required** during testing:
  - Encouragement, talking pet through situation
  - 4 foot leash (no retractable, flexi-leashes permitted)
  - Collars - flat-buckle or plastic slide clasp
  
- The following are **NOT acceptable/allowed** during testing:
  - No training aids permitted during testing:
    - no prong/pinch collars, choke collars, harnesses or halters
  - Jerking or pulling on the leash
  - Harsh words/tone or rough treatment in any way
  - No treats should be carried by hand (or in your pockets) during the testing, nor may they be used during testing (except during *Acceptance of Treat* section of test when we will provide the treat.)

- **Small pets** should be carried in a carrier, a basket, or in your arms. Please provide either a lap blanket or towel to prevent issues with shedding.

## **FEES**

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### **STEX Testing And Training Fee**

\$35.00 for any age handler and 1<sup>st</sup> pet

\$25.00 per additional pet

### **Membership Fee**

\$50 for all adults and 1 dog

\$25 for each additional dog

\$25 for Teen - may handle the pet during a visit, must be accompanied by an adult

\$10 for Junior - may not handle the pet during a visit, must be accompanied by an adult

Teams achieving **STEX Basic Level** receive

Standards of Excellence Certificate - Basic Level

Therapy Companion Please Pet Me Tag

Teams achieving **STEX Intermediate Level** receive

Standards of Excellence Certificate - Intermediate Level

Therapy Companion Please Pet Me Tag

Teams achieving **STEX Advanced Level** receive

Standards of Excellence Certificate - Advanced Level

Therapy Companion Please Pet Me Tag

STEX Lapel Pin

### **Canine Good Citizen test**

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\$15.00 PAWS administration fee

\$8.00 sent to American Kennel Club with CGC form

The American Kennel Club has several badges, tags, and certificates available to order

# THE STEX TEST – 4 Parts

In both sections of the STEX test, the **team** is being evaluated as to the interaction and relationship between the client and the team. The human's responses and actions are being evaluated as well as the pet's.

## 1. BEHAVIOR AND DEMEANOR

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Testing begins the moment you exit your vehicle and enter the building. Teams must arrive for the evaluation prepared to demonstrate model visiting proficiency, including being appropriately groomed and exhibiting proper visiting conduct and appearance. As is true during a regular visit, you will be expected to exhibit not only good control over your pet, but also a good working relationship that reveals an attentive pet and a kind owner.

- a. **Overall team appearance** – evaluator assesses pet and handler for well-groomed appearance
  - Pet** – looks good, smells good, feels good – freshly bathed, acceptable breath, nails trimmed and smooth, no heavy perfume
  - Handler** – clean, neat, appropriately dressed (casual but not sloppy)

## 2. PET ASSESSMENT (Small pets including small dogs may be carried.)

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- a. **Accepting a friendly stranger:** the evaluator will approach you and your pet, stopping to speak to you and shake your hand. Your pet should remain at your side, not jumping, barking, crossing in front of you to greet the evaluator, appearing uncomfortable or acting in an aggressive manner.
- b. **Acceptance of hard stare** – evaluator makes eye contact with pet sustaining stare for 3-5 seconds; pet should show no sign of anxiety or aggression.
- c. **Sitting politely for petting** – your pet must sit quietly at your side to receive petting from the evaluator. Your pet should not show any aggression, nor fear or skittishness.
- d. **Appearance and grooming** – we check pet's ears, eyes, breath, and comfortability with being brushed with a grooming tool as well as touched all over the body, including feet. We will also ask what type of flea preventative is being used.
- \*e. **Loose leash walking** (*All dogs must exhibit this behavior; other small pets are exempt.*) You will be asked to walk through course that includes straight lengths, right and left turns, an about-face, and at least 1 stop. Your pet is expected to be attentive to you, turning and stopping as you do. There should always be some slack in the leash between the 2 of you.
- \*f. **Sit on command**
- \*g. **Down on command**
- \*h. **Staying in place** (All dogs must exhibit this behavior; small pets must do as follows:
  - (*Small pets:* instead of sit and down - pet is passed to 3 strangers
  - instead of stay - pet must remain calm on lap for 30 seconds)
  - (Dogs under 5 pounds must do a sit/down/ and stay on command.
  - They also must be comfortable with being passed around to 3 strangers.)Your dog will need to sit and down on command. Then you will be asked to give the “stay” command, after which you will walk 20 feet away, turn, and return to your pet. You may choose whether your pet stays while sitting or laying down; standing up during a stay is acceptable. Moving from the spot, however, is NOT acceptable.
- \*i. **Coming when called** (*All dogs must exhibit this behavior; other small pets are exempt*) You will leave your dog with the tester (OR put your dog in a stay) then walk away 10 feet, turn and call your dog. Your pet must come straight to you when called.
- \*j. **Reaction to other animals** (e.g., facility pet) You and your pet and another team will approach each other. You will both stop, engage in conversation, shake hands, and then continue on your way. Your pet must wait quietly by your side without crossing in front of

you or greeting either the person or the dog. You are encouraged to put your dog in a sit before the interaction. There must be **NO** evidence of aggressive behavior such as lunging, growling, or jumping. (*Small pets and dogs under 5 pounds may be carried*)

\*k. **Leave it** *All dogs must pass the "leave" test. N/A for small pet.*

**Pet** – able to leave food/pills (we test with really good treats) alone with a “leave it” command or mild leash control

*(small pets must leave food sitting on a table while they are in a lap visiting)*

**Handler** – confident that the pet will leave food on “leave it” command

\*l. **Acceptance of treats**

OPTION 1: Allowing pet to have the treat

**Pet** – able to take a treat gently

**Handler** – willing to instruct the client on how to offer treat

MUST instruct client to use the OPEN PALM method of giving a treat

OPTION 2: Not allowing pet to have the treat

**Handler** – explains why no treats are given

\*\*m. **Supervised separation** (*Not required for STEX*) You will leave your pet with a PAWS assistant and leave the room for a period of 3 minutes. Your pet needs to demonstrate a relaxed attitude during your absence. He must not bark, whine, or try to find you.

**Note:**

\* Any section marked with an asterisk is either not applicable (N/A) for small pets or requires a specified alternate behavior.

\*\* Any section marked with two asterisks is not required for STEX (items marked as such are required only for CGC).

**CGC Note:** Only canines qualify to test for Canine Good Citizen, and must complete and pass all 10 CGC criteria to obtain certification; however, small pets and dogs NOT being tested for CGC, need only complete appropriate sections of the STEX Evaluation as noted above.

**3. WALKING THROUGH A CROWD** (*Small pets and dogs under 5 pounds may be carried*)

You and your pet will be asked to walk calmly through a crowd of 3 or 4 people to show that you will be comfortable in a situation like a busy lobby or activity room. Crowd participants will be doing a variety of things that you may be exposed to in a real visiting situation. You may talk to and encourage your pet during the entire walk.

a. **Accepting jerky movements** – assistant staggers, then moves normally to pet animal

**Pet** – able to accept petting from someone with awkward movements, not overly-protective of handler

**Handler** – reassuring to animal in this situation; touching, gentle talking

b. **Accepting loud/angry noises** – assistant yells then calls and pets the animal

**Pet** – able to accept petting from someone previously loud and angry, not overly-protective of owner

**Handler** – reassuring to pet in this situation; touching, gentle talking

c. **Accepting approach and touch from behind**

**Pet** – able to control behavior without snapping or showing aggressive behavior; pet is allowed to startle mildly

**Handler** – reassuring to pet in this situation – touching, gentle talking; willing to instruct client on acceptable handling of the animal

d. **Reactions to distractions** (such as those a team might encounter during a visit) – distractions come in the form of a something being dropped or other type of loud (usually metallic) noise. Pets may startle, but should not show undue fear or stress.

- e. **Person** - must act as an advocate for pet, be encouraging, calming
- f. **Pet** may startle but must recover quickly, must be comfortable with noise and activity

#### 4. 3 Minute Practice Visit

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- a. Demonstrate proper **2-step approach** as taught in orientation
  - b. Conduct a **pleasant visit**, demonstrating good listening skills and focusing on client
  - c. Demonstrate **respectful closing** as taught in orientation
  - d. **Accepting crowding/petting in a group situation**
    - Pet** – able to handle tight, confining spaces and/or several people in very close proximity
    - Handler** – reassuring to pet in situation; touching, gentle talking
  - e. **Accepting awkward handling** – assistant pets roughly, gives confining hug
    - Pet** – able to handle rough or awkward handling/constricting hugs without growling, jerking, or other negative behaviors (can startle or turn away, quiet grumbling acceptable)
    - Handler** – willing to instruct client on acceptable handling of animal
  - f. Is **pet engaged** with person being visited?
    - Pet** – demonstrate comfort with and interest in client; behave calmly and gently with client; react well to different personalities, distractions, and stress levels
    - PAWS for Reading** – hugs, people close to pet's face, leaning on parts of their bodies, etc.
    - STANDARD Training** – ability to maneuver in tight spaces, accept hugs, etc.
  - g. Is **handler conversational** and pleasant?
    - Handler**
      - demonstrate confidence with different situations
      - comfortable with meeting and talking to strangers
      - demonstrate understanding of the needs of client
      - adjust pet's and own behavior accordingly
      - willingness to interact with client (assist in petting)
      - educate client on proper handling of animal
      - demonstrate respect for client's space at all times
  - h. Is **handler acting as an advocate** for the pet?
    - willingness to intercede to protect pet and self
    - able to foresee potential problem areas (another pet, vacuum cleaner, etc.) and help pet through the difficulty
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## **LIABILITY FOR EVALUATORS**

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“We occasionally receive calls from Evaluators or clubs who are worried about the implications of certifying a dog as a Canine Good Citizen. ‘Will I get sued if the dog I pass later bites someone?’ is the question asked. When an evaluator signs a dog’s CGC test, the evaluator is essentially attesting that the dog was observed to perform all of the skills at a specific test. Although we can try our very best to be responsible, there are no guarantees for the future behavior of animals or humans.”

The above paragraph is quoted from the  
**AKC EVALUATOR’S GUIDE**  
**CANINE GOOD CITIZEN PROGRAM**

PAWS for People™ is in agreement with the above statement concerning the liability of evaluators and the organization they represent. While our evaluators pledge to hold pets and handlers to the highest of standards, they can only attest to the fact that the pet and handler have demonstrated the required behaviors and skills successfully; that team is then registered with PAWS for People™ as either a Basic or Advanced Therapy Team. We cannot guarantee, nor be held responsible for, future behavior.

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