



STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Pet Therapy Team Evaluation Handbook



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

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

1. BEHAVIOR/DEMEANOR/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 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, remaining calm during transitions and waiting periods, and while interacting 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 10th target behavior, *Supervised Separation*
- For the STEX evaluation, appropriate adjustments/deletions have been made for dogs that are under 5 pounds, as well as cats and bunnies.
- Adjustments may also be made for either a pet or handler that has a disability.
- If you are interested in having your dog achieve the CGC title, all 10 behaviors must be exhibited.

3. WALKING THROUGH A CROWD

These 7 crowd 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. THREE 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 & interested in the visitee, as well as able to accept awkward crowding/handling. 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 and be an advocate for his/her pet.

SCORING

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 problem parts 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 attempts.

(Basic level is required for some of our less challenging visitations.)

Intermediate - team carries out behaviors with competence and accuracy on first command; 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 immediately on the first command.

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

TRAITS WE LOOK FOR IN OUR THERAPY TEAMS

HUMAN

Friendly personality
Interested in people
Advocate for the pet
Aware of space/activity around them
Control pet without harshness/force
Demonstrate that behavior is under control of
Relaxed and confident handler at all times
Reveal good working relationship **with pet**

PET

Friendly and gentle behavior
Interested in people
Reliably well-behaved
Predictable reactions appropriate to situation

REGULATIONS/REQUIREMENTS

- All teams must be evaluated every 2 years
- Dogs under 18 months will require a one-time reevaluation in 6 months
- Teen Members (11-17) may STEX and subsequently handle the pet during visits; accompanied by a certified adult member
- Junior Members (10 and younger) must wait until age 11 before handling the pet, but may attend some visits with their adult companion

The following are **acceptable/required** during testing:

- Encouragement, talking pet through situation
Four or five foot leash (no retractable, flexi-leashes permitted)
- Collars - flat-buckle or plastic slide clasp
- Certified service dogs may STEX with harness, or gentle leader. Proof of service certification is required
- Harnesses are allowed for medical reasons. (Veterinarian's letter needed)
- No Martingales can used during STEX

The following are **NOT acceptable/required** during testing:

- **No training aids permitted during testing:**
 - No prong/pinch collars, choke collars or gentle leaders
- **No jerking or pulling on 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 and stroller, or in your arms. Please provide either a lap blanket or towel to prevent issues with shedding
- **Cats and bunnies** don't STEX in the traditional way of dogs, but will be handled and are expected to remain calm for petting

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/DEMEANOR/APPEARANCE

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

- 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, growling or crossing in front of you to greet the evaluator, appearing uncomfortable or acting in an aggressive manner.
- b. **Holding still for petting**
 - 1. Your pet must remain quietly at your side (sitting or standing) to receive petting from the evaluator. Your pet should not show any aggression, fear or skittishness.
 - 2. **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.
 - 3. **Appearance and grooming** - we check pet's ears, eyes, breath, and comfort level with being touched all over the body, including feet. We will also ask what type of flea preventative is being used.
- c. **Basic commands** (*All dogs must exhibit these behaviors; other small pets are exempt.*)
 - 1. **Sit on command**
 - 2. **Down on command**

3. **Stay in place** - 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 dog stays while sitting or lying down.

All dogs must exhibit the above behavior; **bunnies and cats** must do as follows:

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.

4. **Come when called** (*All dogs must exhibit this behavior; bunnies and cats are exempt.*)

Place your dog in a “stay”, walk away 10 feet, turn and call your dog. Your pet must come straight to you when called.

- d. **Loose leash walking** (*All dogs must exhibit this behavior; cat and bunnies are exempt*)

You will be asked to walk through a 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. Pulling on the leash will result in a “Not Ready” grade.

- e. **Greeting a person with a dog** - 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. There must be **NO** evidence of aggressive behavior such as lunging, growling, or jumping. (*Dogs under 5 pounds may be carried*)

- f. **Meeting another dog** - (e.g., facility pet) You and your pet will ask permission to approach and meet another dog. This is a 3-second (snout-to-snout) meeting, and then you will move away from one another. There must be **NO** evidence of aggressive behavior such as lunging, growling, or jumping during any of this portion of the test. Please note: handlers have the right to refuse a nose-to-nose meeting with their dog. (*Small pets and dogs under 5 pounds may be carried.*)

- g. **Food**

1. **Leave it** - all dogs must pass the **leave it** test. Dogs must be able to leave food/pills (we test with really good treats) alone with a “leave it” command or mild leash control. The handler may use another word or phrase

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

2. **Acceptance of treats**

OPTION ONE: Allowing pet to have the treat

Pet - able to take a treat gently

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

OPTION TWO: Not allowing pet to have the treat

Handler - explains why no treats are given

- h. **Supervised separation** (*Not required for STEX - only for CGC certification*) You will give your pet to 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.

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. We expect you to talk to and encourage your pet.

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

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

Handler - be 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 and recover quickly

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 an item being dropped or other type of loud (usually metallic) sound. Pet may startle, but should recover quickly

- e. **Rolling object** - trainer wheels walker/cart/wheelchair by pet; pet must be okay with this

- f. **Person** - must act as an advocate for pet, be encouraging, calming

- g. Pet may startle but must recover quickly, must be comfortable with noise and activity

4. THREE MINUTE PRACTICE VISIT

- 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. 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.

- e. 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

- f. Is **handler acting as an advocate** for the pet?

- willingness to intercede to protect pet and self
- ability to foresee potential problem areas (another pet, vacuum cleaner, etc.) and help pet through the difficulty