

SCHOOL THERAPY DOG POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Amity International School Abu Dhabi uses therapy dogs to work with our students to support literacy, student behaviour and wellbeing. This policy is designed to set out to students, parents and visitors the reasons for having therapy dogs at Amity Abu Dhabi (Section 2 – The benefits of a therapy dog) and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of students, staff, visitors and the dogs (Sections 3 and 4 – Policies and Code of Conduct). Although there is a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment, this can be mitigated against with a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all (Appendix A - Risk Assessment). Frequently asked questions are answered in the end (Appendix B - Frequently Asked Questions) and information about the dogs can be found on the last pages (Appendix C – Dog Profile).

2. BENEFITS OF A SCHOOL DOG

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of having therapy dogs in schools. Therapy dogs have been commonplace in schools in the UK, USA, and Australia for many years.

Evidence indicates that benefits include:

- Cognitive – companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem-solving and game-playing.
- Social – a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing, and focused interaction with others.
- Emotional – a therapy dog improves self-esteem, acceptance from others and lifts mood, often provoking laughter, and fun. Dogs can also teach compassion and respect for other living things as well as relieving anxiety.
- Physical – interaction with a furry friend reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk and stimulates the senses.
- Environmental – a dog in a school increases the sense of a family environment, with all of the above benefits continuing long after the school day is over.
- Reading – reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dog's presence has on children as well as the fact that a dog will listen to children read without being judgmental or critical. This comforting environment helps to nurture children's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence to read aloud.

3. POLICIES

3.1 Approval

The Board of Governors and Executive Principal, agrees and supports the use of therapy dogs within the school.

3.2 School grounds and service dogs

Only the therapy dogs are allowed in the school's premises. All other dogs must not come on site unless the Executive Principal has approved their presence prior to the visit and approval from ADEK is obtained.

3.3 Risk assessment

A risk assessment has been performed which has been approved by the Operations Manager and this will be reviewed annually (See Appendix A).

3.4 Fire evacuation

The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of the owner or other trained staff members.

3.5 Insurance

The school's liability insurance covers the school for risk related to a therapy dog on site. The Finance Manager has responsibility for ensuring this remains part of the school's policy.

3.6 Information

Staff, parents and students will be informed in writing that a therapy dog is in school.

3.7 Consent

Parents can indicate that their child is not allowed to be present during dog therapy sessions by emailing the school via reception@amityabudhabi.ac

3.8 Visitors

The presence of a therapy dog will be sign posted to visitors at reception and the school website. Reception staff will relay any visitor concerns as soon as possible to dog handlers.

3.9 Trained Staff

Only staff trained to handle the dog in student sessions will have permission to do so.

4. CODE OF CONDUCT

4.1 Supervision

The owner will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.

4.2 Illness

If a therapy dog is ill they will not be allowed into school. Dog owners have the responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care is made available if a dog is not able to be in school on a given day.

4.3 Training

The owner is responsible for the continual training of the therapy dogs.

4.4 Lead

Therapy dogs must be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and must be under the full control and supervision of a trained adult (see clause 3.9).

4.5 Down time

Therapy dogs will have a designated rest space for when they are not interacting with students for a scheduled session. They are not allowed to move freely through the building.

4.6 Allergies

Although our therapy dogs are considered “hypoallergenic”, it cannot be guaranteed that people with known allergies will not react. Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near therapy dogs. The School Nurse keeps a list of all students and staff with a reported allergy to dogs and ensures that all trained handlers know who these students and staff are.

4.7 Approval

Staff leading therapy or reading sessions are responsible for checking all staff, students or visitors present are comfortable with therapy dogs before entering the room.

4.8 Supervision

Students must never be left alone with the therapy dogs and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

If the dogs are surrounded by a large number of children, the dogs could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation. If the dogs are displaying any warning signs such as growling or flattening of their ears, they should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling them.

4.9 Appropriate behaviour

Students will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog before any interaction during a therapy session or visit.

4.10 Cleaning

Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by the trained dog handling staff only. The floor would be disinfected.

4.11 Research

The school staff will maintain records and anecdotal evidence of the work and impact of the therapy dogs to better inform research into the benefits of therapy dog.

5. STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 Consent

Students whose parents have withdrawn consent are not allowed to attend dog therapy sessions.

5.2 Touching the dog

Students should be careful to stroke the dogs on their body, chest, back and not by their face or top of head.

Students must wait until the dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking.

5.3 Sleeping

Students are not allowed to approach therapy dogs or disturb them whilst they are sleeping or eating.

5.4 Play

Rough play in which a dog can become overexcited is not accepted at school.

5.5 Eat

Students are not allowed to eat during therapy dog sessions.

5.6 Washing hands

Students must always wash their hands after being in contact with a therapy dog.

5.7 Irresponsible behaviour

Irresponsible, threatening or violent behaviour towards therapy dogs is not accepted at Amity.

APPENDIX A

Risk Assessment

HAZARD	RISK	PERSONS AT RISK	CONTROL MEASURES	COMMENTS/ACTIONS	Severity	Probability
Dog scratches a child or staff member	Injury, possible infection	Young people, staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog and handler have received in depth training from a qualified trainer to minimise the risk of dog reacting negatively • Dog has spent a significant amount of time in school setting prior to meeting students and is well adjusted to the environment • Children will be taught how and when it is safe to interact with dog. • Dog is supervised by staff at all times. • Handler and staff to regularly monitor dog's temperament, behaviour and mood. • Nurse is onsite to sterilise any scratches to prevent infection • Parents and staff have been informed that the dog is onsite and have been given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the activity 	Ensure new students receive dog information.	Medium	Low
Dog bites a child or staff member	Injury, possible infection	Young people, staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog and handler have received in depth training from a qualified trainer to minimise the risk of dog reacting negatively • Dog has spent a significant amount of time in a school setting prior meeting students and is well adjusted to the environment • Children will be taught how and when it is safe to interact with dog. • Dog supervised by staff at all times. • Handler and staff to regularly monitor dog's temperament, behaviour and mood. 	Ensure new students receive dog information.	High	Low

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nurse is onsite to attend to any injuries Dog is not in classes for prolonged periods of time so that it does not become stressed or over-stimulated Parents and staff have been informed that the dog is onsite and have been given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the activity 			
Dog urinates or defecates in the classroom	Hygiene	Young people, staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handler has a managed timetable so that the dog can be walked before and after the session in school The dog is trained and mature enough to make it unlikely there will be a toilet accident Handler has access to a radio to contact cleaners if necessary 	Ensure handler has radio	Low	Low
Stroking/contact with dog and touching mouth or food	Hygiene	Young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children appropriately educated on how to manage canine hygiene. Reminded to wash hands by staff supervising dog. Anti-bacterial gel available in classrooms, offices and staffroom. Establish routines and procedures for children to learn the need for hand washing. 	Ensure children have been properly prepared and sanitiser is available.	Low	High
Fleas, ticks, worms	Hygiene	Young people, staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dog regularly wormed and treated for flea prevention. Handler to closely monitor. 	Ensure dog is regularly checked.	Medium	Low
Allergic reaction	Allergic reaction	Young people, staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dogs have been specifically chosen for being hypoallergenic Parents and staff have been informed and given the opportunity for their child not to participate Children to wash hands after contact with dog. Nurse has been informed to check for any potential allergy risks 	Ensure new students receive dog information. Nurse to check any new students for allergies.	High	Low
Phobia of animals or specific	Emotional trauma, distress	Young people, staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dog and handler have received in depth training from a qualified trainer to 	Handler to check with class teacher	Medium	Low

phobia of dogs	caused through close proximity to a dog		<p>minimise the risk of dog behaving in a negative or aggressive way</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog has spent a significant amount of time in a school setting prior to meeting students and is well adjusted to the environment • Children will be taught how and when it is safe to interact with dog. • Dog supervised by staff at all times. • Parents and staff have been informed that the dog is onsite and have been given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the activity 	before entering the class with dog. Ensure new families receive dog information.		
Dog becoming emotionally tired, anxious	Dog gets irritable or stressed	Dog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handler and staff to regularly monitor dog's temperament, behaviour and mood. • Dog will not be brought into school if unwell • Dog has an allocated safe space in school to use as a quiet space if needed 	Dog is removed from the situation, therapy session continues without the dog.	Low	Medium
Dog's reactions to children behaviour. Banging doors, pulling hair	Dog becomes scared or anxious	Dog, young people, staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog and handler have received in depth training from a qualified trainer to minimise the risk of dog reacting negatively • Dog has spent a significant amount of time in a school setting prior to meeting students and is well adjusted to the environment • Children will be taught how and when it is safe to interact with dog. • Dog supervised by staff at all times. • Handler and staff to regularly monitor dog's temperament, behaviour and mood. • Educating children how to behave when dog is on school site. If this happens the dog will be removed to its "safe" area and only reintroduced to education zone when trust has been re-established 	Handler to communicate with staff about any specific behaviour concerns. Children to be thoroughly prepared prior to dog spending time with the group.	Medium	Low

Fire Drill	Dog left in building	Dog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog has practiced fire alarm procedure and been exposed to alarm sound as part of training • Key member of staff will be responsible for removing dog from the building. • Dog will be signed in as a member of staff so evacuation team know when a dog is on site. 	Ensure dog is in the building when practicing fire drills	High	Low
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APPENDIX B

Frequently Asked Questions

Q What if my child is allergic to dogs?

A It is understandable that some of you may be concerned about possible allergic reactions to a therapy dog. We only allow dogs bred with hypoallergenic coat to be therapy dogs at Amity Abu Dhabi. They will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. Therapy dogs are only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with them. Your permission will of course be sought in advance of your child having access to, and working with, a therapy dog in school.

Q How are therapy dogs cared for at Amity Abu Dhabi?

A Therapy dogs are treated as respected members of our school and live with their primary handler while attending school during the school day. They will have a schedule to support children to ensure a dog is not overwhelmed and will always be accompanied by a trained adult. Therapy dogs will be a working member of staff; their welfare is of utmost importance to us. They will visit the vet regularly for all their injections as well as regular check-ups. Just like any other member of our community they will stay at home if they are unwell.

Q What if my child is scared of dogs?

A Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Therapy dogs will only be in contact with children whose parents have given their permission. However, the dog must be calm and gentle around children and have a very loving and gentle nature. Experience and research have shown that, with proper guidance and handling, children can learn to overcome fear of animals and grow in respect and appreciation for them.

APPENDIX C

Dog Profile

Obi

Obi is a standard Bernedoodle (cross between a Poodle and a Bernese Mountain dog) from a certified breeder D'Anja in The Netherlands. He has completed obedience basic, one and two training and DAI basic training. Obi comes to school every day and loves interacting with the children, showing off his snuffling skills and his lunch time walks. He will be primarily be supporting children with emotional regulation (including exam anxiety, returning to school), social skills and reading skills. He will work primarily on one off or short-term interventions and can also help educate children about having pets and attend science focused units of inquiry. All sessions will be timetabled and will not interfere with other lessons.

Owner

Obi's legal owner is Ms. Sarah. Ms Sarah has full responsibility for the welfare of Obi and all expenses relating to the upkeep of Obi, food and other expenses and ensuring that the dog is vaccinated, wormed and flea treated. Copies of his medical file are kept at school.