

## Practice Team Attributes and Skill Sets for the Care of Working, Assistance, and Therapy Dogs

Knowledge Topics	Veterinary Team Members Should:
<b>Relationship with the handler</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand what the dog’s “job” is, and how they interact with their handlers.</li> <li>• Have a willingness to partner with the handler</li> </ul>
<b>Handling: Locations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a willingness to adapt waiting room policies to involve the handler/owner.</li> </ul>
<b>Handling: General</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide calm, low-stress handling.</li> </ul>
<b>Appointments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider additional time for appointments (e.g., scheduled appointment at the end of the day).</li> <li>• Prioritize early intervention and accomodation for common disease processes (e.g., otitis, dermatitis)</li> </ul>
<b>Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have experience/work toward gaining experience—watch the dogs work.</li> <li>• Have a genuine interest in what these dogs do.</li> <li>• Develop/have an appropriate confidence in working with potentially reactive dogs.</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use appropriate terminology for these dogs (canine vs. military working dog, etc.)</li> <li>• Recognize the importance of timely and thorough communication with the handler and/or the organization that owns the dog.</li> <li>• Discuss with the handler how they prefer to have initial and follow-up communications handled.</li> <li>• In many cases, provide written follow-up outlining the expected duration of recovery and return to work.</li> <li>• Understand when dealing with service/assistance dogs: Importance of communications tailored to disabled individuals (e.g., call-backs, e-mails).</li> </ul>

The **2021 AAHA Working, Assistance, and Therapy Dog Guidelines** are available at [aaha.org/workingdog](http://aaha.org/workingdog).

These guidelines were prepared by a Task Force of experts convened by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) and were subjected to a formal peer-review process. This document is intended as a guideline only, not an AAHA standard of care. These guidelines and recommendations should not be construed as dictating an exclusive protocol, course of treatment, or procedure. Variations in practice may be warranted based on the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to each individual practice setting.

