



Volunteer Handbook

v. 3.4

Updated 7/15/25

1. Purpose

Welcome to Creature Comfort Pet Therapy. This handbook was prepared to provide you with essential information about the policies and expectations of our pet therapy teams. You are encouraged to discuss any questions you may have about the content of this handbook with your Volunteer Manager.

Creature Comfort reserves the right to modify the policies in this handbook without prior notice. The policies described in this handbook replace all prior policies, handbooks, or guidance provided.

Thank you for giving your time and talents to help others. We hope that you find volunteering with Creature Comfort a positive and rewarding experience.

2. Organizational Information

a. Our Mission & Vision Statements

Our Mission Statement

To enhance people's lives through therapeutic visits with caring volunteers and their pets.

Our Vision Statement

To provide caring volunteers dedicated to sharing their pets' love by engaging people in various community settings.

To build connections between volunteers and facilities seeking animal-assisted activities and therapy.

To increase awareness and provide education about the many benefits of pet therapy.

b. Organization Contact Information

Main Phone - 973-285-9083

Main Email - info@ccpettherapy.org

Volunteer Related Contacts

Karen Clark - kclark@ccpettherapy.org

Volunteer Manager

Volunteer onboarding and management

Nancy Fernandez - nfernandez@ccpettherapy.org

Scheduling Coordinator

Visit scheduling, facility-related issues/concerns, and facility onboarding.

Carly Luciano - cluciano@ccpettherapy.org

Community Relations and Event Coordinator

Events, fundraising

Susan Massey - smassey@ccpettherapy.org

Business Assistant

Facility invoicing

Amy Pagano - apagano@ccpettherapy.org

Member Support Specialist

Scheduling training visits, records, member engagement

Executive Contacts

Mary Beth Cooney - mbcooney@ccpettherapy.org

Executive Director

3. Volunteer Information & Policies

a. Use of CCPT official materials

The CCPT badge can ONLY be worn when visiting an approved facility. Please be mindful that many business employees do not understand the difference between a therapy animal and a service animal. Teams should not ask permission to access businesses with their therapy animal if that business does not allow pets. Therapy animals are not service animals and do not have public access rights.

b. Scheduling visits

Creature Comfort uses Volunteer Local (VL) for the visit calendar. This program is a browser-based scheduling system that is easy to navigate and allows teams to sign up directly for visits. Teams will receive login information and usage instructions for VL after they have completed the mentor visit.

Some reminders on scheduling visits:

- We ask our teams to complete an average of one visit a month. You may do as many visits as your animal is comfortable with each month. We ask teams not to do more than one visit a day (for example, going to two different hospital facilities or two different units exceeding an hour of time). Please let us know if you will not be visiting for an extended period.
- Please do not sign up for visits if you are unsure of your availability that day. Once a visit is booked, it becomes unavailable to other teams and is difficult to fill if you need to cancel at the last minute.
- We send sub-request emails that indicate visits missing a team due to a cancellation. Your help in filling these open visits is greatly appreciated.
- In each visit description is the facility contact information. Please make sure to capture this information and have it with you in case you are running late, need to cancel, or so you know who to ask for when you arrive.

If you need to cancel a visit, please:

Log into VL and click the 'cancel this shift' button up to one day before the visit. If your visit is less than one day away and you need to cancel, please notify the facility, the other team(s) on the visit, and CCPT at 973-285-9083, ext. 201.

c. Qualified Team Visits

There are some facilities that have special requirements in addition to the general CCPT certification.

Morristown Medical Center (MMC Team):

In order to do visits at any Atlantic Health facility, you need to become a volunteer of the hospital. We ask that teams do not start the volunteer process with Morristown Medical until they have completed at least 10 visits at different types of facilities. Once you feel you're ready, please contact Nancy (nfernandez@ccpettherapy.org). Nancy will review your visiting history and send you out with an experienced team to evaluate your animal for the hospital environment. She will then guide you through the process of becoming an Atlantic Health volunteer. Only dogs are allowed in Atlantic Health facilities.

Atlantic Health Volunteers Must:

- be at least 18 years old
- have a current flu vaccination and a Tuberculosis (TB) test
- Undergo a background check
- perform at least two visits to the hospital monthly

Other facilities / hospitals (Deirdre's House, Carrier Clinic, Trinitas, JBWS, etc.)

These facilities may have a background check or training that you need to attend to visit. If you are interested in any of these facilities, please contact Nancy (nfernandez@ccpettherapy.org), and she will guide you through the process.

d. Animal restraint and equipment

When visiting, teams should always wear something with the CCPT logo and have their ID badge with them. Wearing the bandana (for your pet) is also suggested. We offer additional clothing choices for purchase on our website.

Restraint:

1. Animals must be under control at all times
 - Never let go of the leash
 - Never let someone else hold the leash who is not certified with the animal
 - If someone is walking your animal, you must use a double leash system
 - Do not let your animal travel to the end of the leash
 - Therapy animals are not to make contact with other animals on visits (therapy or not)
2. Lap Visits
 - The handler must have a hand on the animal and be holding the leash
 - Animals should never be allowed to jump from the lap
 - Animals that are fidgety should be removed immediately
 - Please bring a clean towel or small blanket for the animal to lay on during lap visits.

Approved Equipment:

- Collars (Harness, Head, Martingale, Flat)
- Leash (4-6ft non-retracting leash)
- Small animals (guinea pigs, rabbits, etc.) should be restrained in a basket, bed, stroller, or on a harness / leash.

(prong, stim/electric, or choke collars are prohibited)

e. Animal health and appearance

Health:

Teams should be in good health when doing visits. If you or your pet are experiencing symptoms of illness, please follow the cancellation process.

- Parasite Screens - Animals should undergo annual parasite screens performed by your veterinarian.

- Flea/Tick Preventative - Animals should be up to date on their flea and tick preventative. You are welcome to use any product your vet recommends. If you are using medicated collars, please remove them while visiting. If you are using liquid medication on the neck/back of your pet, please do not administer it within 3 days of visiting. We do not want people getting the chemicals on their hands while petting.

Grooming:

It's not necessary to bathe your pet before each visit. It is perfectly acceptable to use a spritz or waterless shampoo on their coats to keep them smelling fresh and clean. Brushing your pet before visits is a good idea to limit the amount of shedding. Please ensure your pet maintains reasonable oral hygiene. They will be very close to people! Nails should be trimmed and filed to limit the risk of scratching people while visiting. You may want to use a pet-friendly antimicrobial on your pet's coat and feet after visits.

f. Suggested packing list

At every visit, you should be prepared with a supply bag. Below are some suggested items to include in the bag.

- Copy of pet's shots
- Animal brush or comb (the kids especially like to take turns brushing the animals)
- Water, a bowl (folding silicone works great), and a towel to clean up any messes
- Hand wipes
- Lint roller, especially for heavy shedding breeds
- Hand sanitizer
- Plastic clean-up bags, poop bags
- Small pad & pen
- Tissues
- Antimicrobial for your pet's coat and feet after the visit
- Treats (see our treat policy). Consider wearing a treat pouch!
- A small blanket or towel if your pet will get on a bed or in someone's lap
- Extra leash in case someone is walking your dog (double leash system)

g. Dress code

We ask our teams to dress in neat but comfortable attire. Many facilities are very warm or vary significantly in temperature from room to room, so wearing layers is advised. Shorts are permissible everywhere except in the hospitals.

No open-toe shoes are allowed when visiting. Please wear the Creature Comfort shirts when possible. Please wear your ID badge when visiting.

h. Visiting etiquette

Our teams represent not only Creature Comfort while visiting, but also the facility. Teams should always act in a respectful manner. Below are some helpful tips to assist teams during their visit.

- Please turn your cell phone to silent and put it away. Please refrain from taking calls or texts while visiting.
- Always stop at the front desk to check in. Some facilities require you to sign in as a guest.
- Don't let your pet precede you down halls or around corners. Some people are very fearful of dogs and do not expect them inside the facility. Therapy animals should be calm and under control at all times, by your side.
- Stand back when waiting for elevators and always ask others if it's okay to ride with the animal. Residents/patients being transported ALWAYS have priority and teams should wait for the next elevator.
- **ALWAYS ask if someone wants a visit. Watch body language!**
Sometimes, people do not understand what you are asking them, or they may be unable to express their wishes if they do not want to visit.
- Don't touch or lean on a person's wheelchair. Think of it as an extension of their body.
- Never do anything that the medical staff should be doing. If someone asks for help, needs to use the bathroom, or requires assistance, please get a nurse or staff member.
- Never enter a room with a non-therapy pet. The animal is not guaranteed to be friendly, regardless of what the owner says.
- Don't wake people up. If you are unsure, you can quietly ask if they would like a visit and then proceed if they appear to be sleeping.
- Always ask before moving things, and return items to their original position. Remember, when conducting room visits, you are entering the person's home for the duration of the visit.
- When conducting room visits, always ask the person next to the door if it's okay to enter to see if their roommate wants a visit.
- Learn how to move on gracefully. Don't overstay your welcome.
- If you are ever unsure if someone wants to pet your animal, always err on the side of caution. Stand back and tell the person about your pet, make general conversation, and then move on. Please do not allow your pet to approach someone without permission from that person.
- When visiting individuals with mobility limitations, it is permissible to gently assist them in petting your animal.
- It's a nice idea to carry hand sanitizer and offer it to people after they've pet your animal. The hospital offers wipes to everyone after a visit.
- You should use the hand sanitizers provided by the facility (usually located on the wall) when passing them to limit the spread of germs.

i. Communications

- Many people we visit deal with stressful, upsetting, and uncomfortable situations. When communicating with the people you visit please do not speak of their situation. We want to take them away from whatever they are dealing with. Keep the conversation light.
- Speak to people at eye level when possible. If there is a seat available nearby, pull it over and sit with the person. You will most likely do a lot of bending/squatting while visiting!
- Teams are NEVER to exchange personal contact information with anyone they visit with. If someone wants to communicate/send something to you, please have them contact the main office.

j. Using treats

- No treats at the hospitals. The handler cannot dispense treats to the animal either.
- For non-hospital visits, if your animal can gently take a treat from the hand without teeth being felt, you may let people offer a treat. We never want anyone to feel teeth on their skin, and therapy animals should never grab for food.
- Extra care should be taken with children due to food allergies. The safest option is not to allow children to handle treats.
- You should not use treats in tight spaces with multiple dogs. The risk for resource guarding is high when dogs are in close proximity.
- You should always ask other teams on the visit if it's okay to use treats. If treats become a distraction while doing the visit, they should be put away.
- Be careful when offering treats to Dementia or special needs patients. Staff frequently hand them food/medication during the day, and we don't want them to mistakenly eat the treat.

k. Managing interactions and stress

Handlers are expected to monitor their animal for signs of stress and manage interactions accordingly. Our primary concern is that your pet remains comfortable at all times. Here are some reminders to keep visits stress-free.

- Let your pet have a choice to approach the person, especially in the first few visits, until they get comfortable and learn their job.
- Always provide your pet with a means of escape. Move things around in the room if you need to make more space for them to be comfortable. Just remember to return things to their original locations.
- Always monitor interactions. People are unpredictable.
- Stop interactions that are not appropriate or are making the animal uncomfortable. We want teams to speak up when needed.
- If you ever feel that the interactions are not manageable or your pet is uncomfortable, please notify a facility staff member and leave. Please call the office to let us know, so we can make things better for your next visit.

I. Visiting with other teams

Many visits are scheduled for two teams. The visit may allow for the teams to split up and visit in separate areas, or they may be visiting together.

Here are some tips to make dual team visits successful:

- If you need to cancel a visit, please notify the other team using the roster in VL.
- Please arrive at least 10 minutes early and meet the other team outside.
- **Teams are not to allow their animals to make contact with each other.**
If your dog has trouble visiting without saying “hello” to the other dog, then consider solo visits.
- Avoid going into the visit until all animals are calm and ready.
- Always ask other teams before using treats on a visit
- Try to avoid surprising other teams. Ensure the handler and animal see you from a distance before approaching them if you arrive late or during the second shift.

m. Confidentiality

What happens on a pet therapy visit stays on the visit! Please respect the privacy of those you are visiting. **Do not exchange personal contact information** (i.e., phone, email) with anyone on a visit. If you happen to know the person you are visiting, please maintain the same level of confidentiality.

Any access to patient information during visits **must** remain confidential.

Sharing any *personal* or *identifying* information about the individuals you visit — including names, exact locations, medical information, photos, or personal stories — is strictly prohibited on social media or any public platform. We must strive to protect the privacy and dignity of those we serve and to remain fully compliant with confidentiality agreements and facility policies.

Violating confidentiality can result in your termination from our program.

n. Picture policy

Volunteers are prohibited from taking photographs during therapy visits. Instead, if you would like to capture a memory, you are welcome to take photos of your therapy animal before or after the visit in common areas such as the lobby, outdoors, or near facility signage.

To clarify:

✓ Allowed: Taking photos of your therapy pet *before or after* the visit in public or common areas.

✓ Allowed: A resident, patient, or facility staff member wishes to take a photo of your pet or asks you to take a picture of them using *their* camera or phone.

✗ Not Allowed: Volunteers taking photos *while doing* the visit or of the people they are visiting.

✗ Not Allowed: Accepting pictures from someone's cellphone / email, as doing so is exchanging contact information. Please encourage folks to instead share their pictures on our public Facebook page, Creature Comfort Pet Therapy, so we can use them. We also have the following social media tags - @ccpettherapy #ccpettherapy.

Occasionally, Creature Comfort may send individuals without a pet to take photos during visits with permission obtained in advance from the facility. These photos will be used for marketing purposes.

Volunteer Liability Agreement

- I will carry my CCPT ID card with me on all visits.
- I will carry copies of my pet's shot records with me on all visits.
- I will not perform visits if my records or certification have expired.
- I will not exchange personal contact information (i.e. phone, email) with anyone on a visit.
- I will not share any *personal* or *identifying* information about the individuals I visit — including names, exact locations, medical information, photos, or personal stories — on social media or any public platform.
- I will adhere to the CCPT photo policy as stated in the volunteer handbook. I will not take pictures while visiting or of the people I am visiting.
- I will notify CCPT ASAP if I have any concerns or issues with a facility, my animal, other volunteers or anyone on a visit.
- I understand that the CCPT vest, bandana, leash cover, and ID card can ONLY be used when visiting approved CCPT facilities.
- I will properly restrain my animal at all times (always one hand on the leash / 6 feet of space between other animals) and will only use approved equipment for CCPT visits.
- I understand that CCPT insurance covers volunteers in good standing for visits at CCPT-approved facilities ONLY.
- I understand that facility visits not sanctioned by CCPT are done at my own risk.
- I understand that performing pet therapy visits, despite the greatest care and training, presents an element of risk and that CCPT makes no representations or guarantees that the certification received removes such risk for myself or my pet.
- I understand that CCPT reserves the right to terminate my certification at any time if deemed necessary.

Incident Reports

All incident reports should now be filed online using this link:

<https://www.memberleap.com/members/form.php?orgcode=CCPT&fid=3173213>.

Please let us know of any concerns or issues with:

- other volunteers
- a facility
- those you visit
- your own animal

Someone from Creature Comfort will contact you to discuss the situation.

CREATURE COMFORT PET THERAPY PHOTO RELEASE FORM

Participant's Name: _____

I hereby authorize Creature Comfort Pet Therapy to publish photographs/videos taken of me for use in Creature Comfort Pet Therapy's printed publications, website and, possibly, local newspapers.

I acknowledge that since my participation in publications and websites produced by Creature Comfort Pet Therapy is voluntary, I will receive no financial compensation.

I further agree that my participation in any publication and website produced by Creature Comfort Pet Therapy confers upon me no rights of ownership whatsoever. I release Creature Comfort Pet Therapy from liability for any claims by me or any third party in connection with my participation.

Signature of participant or guardian: _____

Date: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____