

PAT “Good Behaviour” Refresher Course

While all Pets as Therapy dogs go through a comprehensive assessment to test their suitability to the job, it is not a requirement for the dogs to be highly obedience trained. The focus is on the sociability of the dogs and their general “good” behaviour in public places.

Some PAT dogs have very little, if any, formal training and in the **general** visiting environment this may not be a requirement. However, I believe that **basic** obedience training contributes greatly to the overall good behaviour of the dog and more importantly determines to a large extent, the control that the human member of the team has over their canine companion in a possibly unpredictable environment.

Often there may seem to be no need for any obedience exercises until something out of the ordinary takes place at the visited facility. For example, if an elderly person falls over, the least the PAT visitor should be able to do is prevent their dog from jumping on top of the person and licking them and the most would be to carefully help the person up. To be able to do either of these things a sit/down stay command would be most useful. Another instance would be if a child being visited accidentally dropped a food item, the PAT visitor should be able to prevent the dog from snatching and eating it. In this case the “leave it” cue would be required.

It must also be noted that many people of all ages are wary of exuberant dogs i.e. dogs that jump up, paw or bark at a person they want attention from. Many people in facilities are frail, unwell and unused to dealing with animals of any sort. Overexcited behaviour can be a real deterrent when people are considering interacting with a dog.

I would like to encourage all PAT dog owners to join me for a refresher “good behaviour” course. The course will cover basic obedience work designed to enhance the PAT visiting experience for all involved. **The following exercises will be taught:**

1. **Watch me!** (Teaching your dog to focus on you and ignore distractions.)
2. **Come with me!** (Teaching your dog to move away from a tempting distraction and reorient towards you.)
3. **Sit, Down & Stand**
4. **Sit Stay & Down Stay**
5. **Leave it!**
6. **Heel!** (teaching the dog to walk at your side and not to pull ahead)

There will also be an opportunity to address problem behaviours such as excited or demanding barking, jumping up and snatching at treats as well as a chance for you to ask for help with specific problems you may be experiencing during visits.

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