



Facility Guide for Virtual Visits

Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program



Pet Partners
Touching Lives, Improving Health

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Purpose of this Document

We are grateful for your interest in collaborating with registered Pet Partners therapy animal teams to create impactful engagement opportunities for your students, clients, patients, and colleagues.

While it is impossible to replace the emotional connection people share with pets and therapy animals during face-to-face interactions, Pet Partners recognizes that there may be times when therapy animal visits are impractical or unviable, perhaps due to geographic distance or human health issues that disallow in-person meetings. In these situations, there is still room to incorporate the healing power of the human-animal bond. Pet Partners has two new initiatives to help share the love of pets, even when we can't interact with them face-to-face:

- **Virtual Visit Opportunities:** These are real-time digital interactions with Pet Partners therapy animal teams, usually via a live video chat. As outlined throughout this guide, these visits allow for personal interaction via means such as video calling and other online video platforms.
- **Animal-Related Engagement:** As evidenced in preliminary research findings on the positive impact of animal-related stimuli, these engagement opportunities allow for some of the benefits of human-animal interaction by encouraging participants to remember the feelings associated with interacting with an animal. These activities might include crafts, puzzles, and games or interaction with videos, written content, photos, and toy animals. Such activities can be adapted for any population, bringing the positive influence of animals to a wide range of people who might benefit from these activities. While these engagements are not thoroughly covered by this guide, page 6 contains some avenues for any team or any facility, regardless of previous interaction, to collaborate on engagement.

The potential success of these initiatives is supported by preliminary research ([see here](#)), which demonstrates that animal-related engagement can be beneficial for certain populations by improving positive emotions and providing an avenue to deliver key principles of humane education and animal welfare. Best practices within the field of animal-assisted interventions also emphasize the negative impact that an abrupt end to therapy animal visitations might have on clients, patients, and students; remote visits may be a way to ease that impact, whether short- or long-term.

Again, thank you for your partnership in offering a virtual Pet Partners connection!

Virtual Visit: Necessary Components

Virtual visits require the handler and the facility to work together to make sure they both have the appropriate equipment, software, and expectations to make a virtual visit a reality. Ample communication prior to the virtual visit will help ensure the meeting goes smoothly.

Equipment

Below is the list of equipment recommendations for performing a virtual visit. Handlers should have one of the following pieces of equipment so they can successfully video chat with their facility. Be sure your device is fully charged or connected to a power source throughout the visit.

- Smart phone with video capabilities
- iPad or other tablet with audio and video capabilities
- Laptop with audio and video capabilities

Video Software

Handlers are encouraged to use one of the following video chat platforms to ensure a successful virtual therapy animal team visit. These platforms are recommended primarily because they are the most widely used.

- Skype
 - Get started: <https://www.skype.com/en/get-skype/>
 - Need help? <https://support.skype.com/en/skype/all/>
- Zoom
 - Get started: <https://zoom.us/download>
 - Need help? <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362003>
- Facetime
 - Get started: <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT204380>
 - Need help? <https://getsupport.apple.com/>
- Google Hangouts
 - Get started: <https://hangouts.google.com/>
 - Need help? <https://support.google.com/hangouts/>

Privacy

We understand that privacy is an important component to consider when implementing virtual visiting at your facility. It is the responsibility of the facility to ensure that all Pet Partners virtual visits are in compliance with HIPAA or other privacy laws. Pet Partners is not responsible for ensuring compliance.

Communicate with the Therapy Animal Team

A therapy animal team is made up of one handler and one therapy animal. We generally recommend that virtual visits occur between handlers and facilities who already have a relationship, so please reach out to handlers you know directly for discussion about virtual visits as the very first step.

We strongly recommend you review the following important topics ahead of time:

- Explain the equipment, video capabilities, and internet requirements needed for performing a virtual visit. Ensure you can both use the same platform.
- Determine your point person; they will be responsible for helping set up the virtual visit on your end and will transport the required equipment around the facility so the therapy animal team can visit with either one or several different people.
- Schedule the exact date and time of the virtual visit and add to the facility's activity calendar, if necessary.
- Agree that the facility point person and the handler will log into the video software 10 minutes before the scheduled virtual visit to make sure all the equipment is working correctly.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the appropriate visit length for a virtual therapy animal visit?

We recommend the overall length of a virtual visit last no longer than an hour, if the handler is remotely meeting with multiple individuals; this is about 5–10 minutes per person, and 4–6 individuals from your facility participating. In situations where the facility may be gathering multiple individuals into one room (and perhaps displaying the video on a community television or screen), longer than fifteen minutes might be acceptable, if the handler and animal are up for the task!

What does a virtual visit look like?

A handler and their animal will be on one end of the video platform and a client, patient, or other individual will be watching, although the interaction will be back and forth. In most cases, the facility point person will be “in the middle,” handling the technology and staying within close distance to solve technical issues and transport the equipment to the next individual, in cases where the visit will move to clients.

What will the handler and client/patient discuss during a virtual visit?

Below is a list of topics handlers may discuss during a virtual therapy animal visit. Remember that, while a virtual therapy animal visit is different from an in-person visit, many of the same topics a handler discusses during an in-person visits are appropriate to discuss during a virtual visit.

- How do you take care of your animal?
- Where does your animal likes to be pet?
- How do you groom your animal?
- What tricks does your animal know?
- What are your animal’s favorite activities?
- What does your animal like to do during their down time?
- Are there any unique or funny facts about your animal?

If a facility point person is present during the entire visit, they may wish to prompt conversation on behalf of the client or patient as well. This is at the facility’s discretion.

Can a team do virtual Read With Me™ Visits?

If you have a relationship with a therapy animal team who has previously performed a Read With Me therapy animal visit at your facility, you can absolutely do these visits virtually.

Other Options for Animal-Related Engagement

Any Pet Partners registered handler is welcome to join a private Facebook group: Therapy Animal Visits from Pet Partners. In this group, handlers are invited to share videos, photos, slideshows, and written content related to their therapy animals. Facilities are also invited to join the same group and, from the group, they can share or download content submitted by our handlers and share it with their clients, patients, students, staff or others. This is an alternative to the live virtual visits explained in this guide and may be a good fit for handlers or facilities who are unable to participate in more direct interaction.

Join here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/TherapyAnimalVisitswithPetPartners/>

How Can We Help?

Pet Partners is here to support our volunteers and the facilities where they visit in having positive, safe, and rewarding therapy animal visitation experiences. As you consider expanding the presence of therapy animal teams at your facility to include virtual visits, we're here to answer questions and provide expert guidance.

www.petpartners.org/contact-us/