

PERSONNEL
Series 4000
Policy #4036.1.1

THERAPY ANIMALS IN THE WORKPLACE

Purpose

This policy establishes guidelines for bringing therapy animals into the workplace to support employee mental health and well-being. Therapy animals can provide comfort, reduce stress, and create a more positive work environment. However, their presence must be balanced with considerations for employee safety, allergies, phobias, and work productivity.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees, contractors, and visitors who may seek to bring a therapy animal into the workplace. It addresses therapy animals only and does not apply to service animals, which are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and have a separate policy. EASTCONN has separate policies regarding Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals.

Definitions

1. **Therapy Animal:** A domesticated animal trained to provide comfort and support through affection and companionship. Therapy animals are typically trained and certified but do not have the same legal protections as service animals. They may be invited to specific settings as part of approved programs.
2. **Handler:** The employee or person responsible for the care and supervision of the therapy animal within the workplace.
3. **Therapy Animal Certification:** A certification issued by an accredited therapy animal organization indicating that the animal has received training for handling workplace environments and public interactions.

Request and Approval Process

Employees who wish to bring a therapy animal into the workplace must obtain prior written approval from the Director of Human Resources (or the Executive Director in the absence of the Director of Human Resources), submitting required information/documentation as follows:

1. Description of Animal: A description of the animal.
2. Purpose of Visit: Clearly state the need for the therapy animal, such as emotional support to reduce stress, enhance mental health or assist with specific therapeutic goals related to an individual's well-being.
3. Schedule of Visits/Duration: State the date(s), time(s) and location of the visit.
4. Therapy Animal Certification: Provide proof of current certification from a reputable therapy animal organization.

5. Vaccination and health records: Provide verification that the animal is current on vaccinations, free from illness, and has regular vet check-ups.
6. Insurance: Provide proof of liability insurance for any potential damages or injuries caused by the therapy animal while on EASTCONN property. EASTCONN may hold the owner or handler of a therapy animal liable for any property damage caused by the animal to the same extent required by other EASTCONN policy or administrative regulations that impose liability for property damage. In addition, either the owner or handler, or both, may be liable for personal injury caused by the animal or related to the presence of the animal on school property.
7. Provide the city/town license for the animal.

Requirements and Responsibilities

- **Limited Access**: Approved therapy animals are permitted in designated areas only, such as private offices, break rooms, or specified wellness spaces. Therapy animals are not permitted in shared workspaces, conference rooms, cafeterias, or any area where their presence could interfere with work or safety.
- **Conduct/Control**: Therapy animals must be well-behaved, leashed (if required by the animal type), and under the handler's supervision and control at all times. If the handler cannot be present, the animal must leave the premises. They must not pose a distraction, create an unsanitary or unsafe environment and must not pose a threat to the health or safety of others disrupt workflow. Animals showing aggressive/inappropriate behavior, signs of illness, or lack of training will be required to leave immediately.
- **Animal Care**: Handlers are responsible for cleaning up after therapy animals and ensuring their animal's needs (e.g., water, bathroom breaks, any cleanup required) are met without disrupting work. EASTCONN will not provide food, care, or supervision for the animal.
- **Hygiene**: The animal must be clean and free of fleas, ticks, and other pests. The handler must ensure the animal's hygiene is maintained to prevent workplace health risks.

Considerations for Others

- **Allergies and Phobias**: HR will conduct an assessment to ensure no employees in the immediate area have allergies, phobias, or medical conditions that could be aggravated by the presence of a therapy animal. Reasonable accommodations will be made to support all employees.
- **Opt-Out Option**: Employees who prefer not to work near a therapy animal for any reason can request a workspace adjustment.

Right to Restrict Access/Removal

EASTCONN reserves the right to revoke therapy animal privileges if:

- The animal behaves disruptively, aggressively, or unsanitarily.
- The handler fails to comply with policy requirements.
- The presence of the animal fundamentally alters the nature of a program or activity.
- Complaints from other employees indicate that the presence of the animal is adversely affecting the work environment.

Reporting Concerns

Employees with concerns or complaints about a therapy animal should contact HR. EASTCONN will address these concerns promptly, with respect for privacy and sensitivity toward all involved.

Emergency Procedures

In case of an emergency, employees with animals are responsible for ensuring the safety and evacuation of their animal, where possible. Emergency personnel should be informed of any service animals present.

Compliance with Other Policies

This policy should be considered alongside EASTCONN's policies on health, safety, and workplace conduct. The Director of Human Resources will work with relevant departments to ensure fair accommodations for employees and animals. Nothing herein is intended to conflict with any rights or entitlements under applicable federal or state law.

Grounds for Denial

A request may be denied if the animal presents an undue hardship, health risk, or significant disruption to workplace operations. Allergies, phobias, or other employees' concerns will also be considered, and additional accommodations may be made for both parties as needed.

Policy Review and Updates

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Employees are encouraged to direct any questions or concerns to the Director of Human Resources.

(cf. Policy #5003.9.1 Service Dogs)

Legal References:

Connecticut General Statutes:

- § 10-220(a) Duties of board of education.
- § 10-231g Green cleaning program at schools: Definitions. Implementation. Notice.

Adopted: February 25, 2025

Revised:

Replaces: