

HEARTS & PAWS



COMFORT DOGS

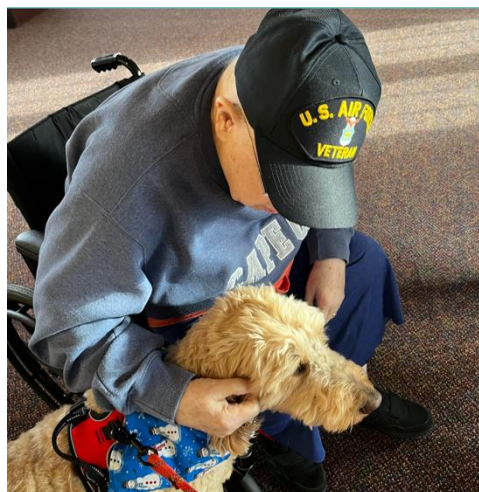
Forward

It's been a long, frustrating day... maybe a test at school didn't go well, your boss wasn't in a good mood, social plans got all mixed up.

Everyone has days like this, they're part of life. But realizing that doesn't really make you feel any better.

However, as soon as you arrive home, you're greeted by an enthusiastic dog with a swiftly wagging tail — and in that one brief moment, you realize things may not be as bad as they seem.

Whether you're tall or short, thin or heavy, young or old, that simple wagging tail can bring a peace and calmness to what seemed only a few minutes ago to be a hectic life.



Simply put: You feel comfort.

Our main mission at Hearts & Paws Comfort Dogs is to bring that feeling of comfort and peace to as many people as possible.

All our dogs are trained and certified as Canine Good Citizens. We visit schools, nursing homes, senior centers, veterans' groups and more around Cape Cod with these canine ambassadors of goodwill.

In addition, our dogs attend many community events and nonprofit fundraisers to help with those beneficial programs and services.

Remember that wagging tail that greeted you at the door? Comfort is a great feeling — one we love to share!



**Be well,
Your human and canine friends at Hearts & Paws Comfort Dogs**



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Note: The Hearts & Paws Comfort Dogs Handbook may be revised based on updated information. Spring 2024



Chapter 1: Welcome to Hearts & Paws Comfort Dogs

Hearts & Paws Comfort Dogs (HPCD) was incorporated on January 1, 2022. The original group of 10 volunteers formed a close relationship, based on the unconditional love we experience with dogs. As of spring 2024, HPCDs has approximately 50 members across Cape Cod.

Mission statement

We describe our mission as “a group of dog lovers who have come together to form a nonprofit organization that allows us to spread comfort and love of specially trained dogs throughout our Cape Cod communities.”

Canine Good Citizen certification

HPCD requires the American Kennel Club’s Canine Good Citizen (CGC) certification for all our member dogs providing comfort services. Training and testing for the CGC exam are provided by local certified trainers at the dog owner’s expense.

CGC training and testing includes the following areas:

- Accepting a friendly stranger
- Sitting politely for petting
- Appearance and grooming
- Out for a walk (walking on a loose lead)
- Walking through a crowd
- Sit and down on command and staying in place
- Coming when called
- Reaction to another dog
- Reaction to distraction
- Supervised separation

Volunteer organization

HPCD is a volunteer organization 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC). No members receive a salary or compensation of any sort. HPCD’s members attend community events and raise money to support various local nonprofit organizations, including The Cape Cod Family Pantry, Cape Kid Meals, Cape Cod Cares for Troops, Lily House, Tommy’s Place, the Sampson Fund for Veterinary Care, and others.



Chapter 2: Hearts & Paws Comfort Dogs Visiting Teams

Whenever visits occur, the HPCD team includes at least two handler/dog teams and at least one spotter. The visit is coordinated by one of HPCD's regional coordinators.

The members of the team arrive at the visit site at least 15 minutes in advance. Team members will already know the visit type and expectations from the regional coordinator or the site contact person, who has been identified prior to the visit.

Before participating as a handler or spotter, new members who have attended an orientation session are required to shadow a team (without their dog, if new member is a handler). The regional coordinator will arrange the shadowing visit.

As an HPCD volunteer, you are always expected to conduct yourself in a professional manner and be respectful about the work of the HPCD organization. All volunteers must abide by the requirements described in this handbook, as well as those discussed in the initial orientation session and documented on the volunteer attestation form. Should a member decide not to comply with these requirements, HPCD reserves the right to terminate the relationship with the volunteer.

The next chapters provide an overview of each team member's roles.



Chapter 3: Dogs

This section outlines the requirements for comfort dogs participating in HPCD programs.

Vaccinations

All vaccinations must be current. Upon membership renewal you are required to update your dog's status on the following:

- Rabies
- DHLPP
- Fecal test
- Heartworm
- Date of last exam

Illnesses and medications

- The dog should be free of any signs of sickness such as wounds, rashes, vomiting, lameness, eye infections, extreme shedding, diarrhea, sutures, odd smelling ears/breath or chronic illness.
- The dog must be free of fleas, ticks, ear/skin mites, lice and intestinal parasites; a dog experiencing any of these issues in the past 24 hours is not allowed on a comfort site visit.
- Oral or topical flea/tick protection is required (no flea collars allowed); topical flea/tick medications cannot be applied within 48 hours of a comfort site visit.
- In addition, the dog should not visit if it is taking medications for an infection or illness (excluding preventative medications such as heartworm), within one week of receiving Bordetella vaccine nasally (as there may be elevated risk of infection for the dog) or if another animal in the same household is sick with an unknown cause.
- Female dogs in heat are not allowed to visit.

Dog preparation

Before the visit:

- Your dog must be well groomed with trimmed nails, a brushed coat, and clean eyes, ears and teeth.
- For dogs that drool, bring a towel to clean up and use hand sanitizer after wiping your dog's face.
- Upon arrival at the facility, the dog should be allowed a last toileting in an out-of-the-way area prior to entering the facility. Handlers are responsible for bringing poop bags and disposing of any waste properly.
- Dogs must be on a short 4- to 6-foot leash along with buckle collar, limited slip collar (Martingale) or EZ Walk harness; flexi-leads, adjustable leashes, e-collars, head halters, choke, prong or pinch collars are not acceptable for visitation or events.



- Comfort dogs must wear HPCD bandanas; those certified as therapy dogs must wear ID tags.

During the visit:

- The dogs should not be fed by anyone other than the handler. Visitation groups should discuss whether or not any food is going to be given to any dog at the visit prior to entering the visit, as some other dogs become distracted by food and will not pay attention to the clients. An ideal time to do this is in the 15 minutes ahead of the visit when everyone meets outside.
- If an accident occurs, the handler needs to clean up as well as possible (always carry clean-up bags) and notify the facility contact person for proper sanitation.
- Most facilities will not want a dog to bark as it may frighten participants, patients or family members.
- No play time or interactions allowed with other dogs; the only interaction should be with the clients and staff. Handlers may allow participants to brush their dogs.

Certifications:

- Comfort dogs must be at least one year of age and certified as an AKC Canine Good Citizen (CGC).
 - Approved comfort dogs are eligible to visit schools, libraries, nursing homes and senior centers.
- Therapy certified dogs must be at least one year of age and certified as a therapy dog by Bright and Beautiful Therapy Dogs or the Alliance of Therapy Dogs.
 - Approved therapy dogs are eligible to visit hospitals and hospices.



Chapter 4: Handlers

The handler is responsible for the quality of the interactions with the dog and those participating in the visit. Joy and comfort should be shared through tactile interactions and conversations about the dog; the visit is not about entertainment. You are a role model for outstanding animal care.

The handler must also be sensitive to the environment where the visit occurs. For example, some visits will include adults or children who are unfamiliar with dogs. The environment may also include various equipment that may be less familiar to the dog.

There may be occasions when you disagree with a request from a participant. If that request would negatively affect your dog, the visitation site contact person and your spotter will honor your expertise. Should there be a disagreement with another member of the team, we ask that that conversation occur off-site. Please report any issues to the regional coordinator who set up that visit.

Health and confidentiality requirements

- COVID vaccinations, negative COVID tests, masks, flu vaccinations, if required by visitation sites or other venues/events.
- Handlers going into hospitals and other regulated facilities may be considered volunteers of those facilities and need to participate in their orientation programs and comply with their required health assessments.
- Confidentiality is a requirement for all visits; many facilities will ask you to sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure their clients' or participants' privacy.
- Anything learned about any individual is privileged information and should not be discussed with anyone else; it is a violation of their privacy to take pictures or videos of the participants or clients. Photos may only be taken with permission of the subject and if they are a minor, their parent or guardian.

Handler preparation

Before the visit:

- Completion of HPCD required training, including orientation and a shadow visit prior to an actual visit with your dog.
- Know where you and your dog are best suited to visit; for example, if your dog does not like kids hugging them or getting close to their face, schools and comparable sites might not be the best option for you.
- VSP software will remind team members about their upcoming visits.
- Spotters will check-in their team members at each visit.



What to bring on a visit:

- ID badge
- Short 4- to 6-foot leash
- Appropriate collar (buckle, limited slip, Martingale or EZ Walk Harness)
- Plastic bags for waste removal
- Hand sanitizer
- Cleaning supplies in case of an accident
- Towels for feet and fur if raining; for drool face cleanup
- Sticky rolling lint brush
- Water and bowl
- Treats

During the visit:

- Be sure to check in at the beginning of each visit as required by the visitation site.
- At all times, keep your dog safe – that will help to keep the clients safe.
- Be aware of your dog — recognize their cues and remove yourself and your dog immediately if there are any negative, threatening or questionable issues.
- Never leave your dog alone with staff, patients or visitors.
- Stay focused on your dog despite what may be going on around you — dog visits are not social events.
- Be alert to wheelchairs, walkers and canes, and your dog's feet and tail.

During hospital and nursing home visits:

- Be sure hospital staff accompanies you.
- Always use appropriate stairs and elevators (stairs only in the event of a fire).
- In hallways, have your dog walk close to the walls.
- During an emergency, immediately get out of the way.
- If a patient drops something, ask hospital staff to pick it up.
- Possible things that may affect your dog: slippery floors; unfamiliar sounds of healthcare equipment such as alarms, ventilators or monitors; scents such as disinfectants, human urine or feces, vomit or blood; food wrappers or food on the floor, bedside tables or garbage cans.
- Be alert for signs of stress from the dog during and up to 24 hours after the visit such as whining, ears at the side or back of head, pulling on the leash toward the exit, facing away from the client, yawning, excessive licking or irritability.
- Watch for any reactions from patients that could signal irritation, stress or danger.
- Be aware that elderly patients have frail skin and bruise very easily.



Other considerations:

- Remember the handler and dog are on display and constantly being evaluated, so use hand signals and a soft voice, if possible.
- Maintain close proximity and keep a hand on your dog to remain aware of subtle changes such as muscle tension; your dog will be reassured by your touch during these visits.
- While closely supervising your dog, allow the participant/client to feel as if they are alone with the dog.
- Dog treats during visits are not encouraged, although the handler may use treats at their discretion; participants are not allowed to give treats to any dog without written permission from the site coordinator.

If a negative incident occurs:

- If a dog-related injury to a client, employee, resident, attendee or dog in the facility occurs during a visit, *immediately notify the site contact person, document the incident, and contact your regional coordinator.*

After the visit:

- Remember your dog worked hard, lavish it with praise, play time as well as down time, and treats!



Chapter 5: Spotters

The spotter is a unique role developed by HPCD to ensure there is always a “second set of eyes” reviewing the environment (including space, dog, handler and participants). The spotter is meant to be an asset to the handler team(s).

Before the visit:

- VSP software will remind team members about their upcoming visits.
- Spotters will check-in their team members at each visit.

During the visit:

- The spotter should remain attentive to the setting and not be overly engaged with members of the group.
- The spotter will be intentionally focused on the quality of the approximate one-hour visit and will manage the timing of all visits, with a five-minute warning prior to the close of a visit.
- Should an unexpected distraction occur, such as an unruly participant or an uninvited visitor joining the group, the spotter is the one to intervene by asking the person to leave or ensure they are not providing an inappropriate distraction to participants, handlers or dogs.



Chapter 6: Regional Coordinators

A visit is initiated when a regional coordinator and site contact person agree on a date and time of the visit.

- There are 3 regional coordinators. The Upper Cape Coordinator manages visits in Bourne, Sandwich, Falmouth, and Mashpee. The Mid and Lower Cape Coordinator manages visits in Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis, Harwich, Brewster, and Chatham. The Outer Cape Coordinator manages visits in Orleans, Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro, and Provincetown.
- Regional coordinators establish expectations, frequency (one time or ongoing), type of space, type of participants, education about the organization, and types of participants, such as age and ability.
- Regional coordinators will verify if there are enough members (handlers/spotters) to participate in a visit.
- Regional coordinators will share visit dates, time and location with spotters and handlers, and then the Volunteer Scheduling Pro (VSP) software reminds team members of their upcoming visits.
- Should a spotter or handler be unable to attend a scheduled visit, they should request a substitute on VSP and contact their regional coordinator by text or phone. This step is critical if the need for replacement arises on short notice, as the visit may need to be cancelled.
- Handlers and spotters must contact the regional coordinator if there is an untoward event of any type, that occurs during a visit.



Chapter 7: Best Practices for Successful Visits

To promote a successful visit, experience has shown that the following best practices are helpful:

- All team members should arrive 15 minutes in advance and commit to remaining for the visit duration, unless some unexpected event occurs. Visits usually last between 45-60 minutes.
- Team members will wear designated HCPD shirts and/or badges and dogs will wear identifiable bandanas (Note: masks may be required by the visit site).
- Team members will introduce themselves and handlers will be prepared to share “fun facts” about their dogs.
- Engagement will begin with dogs visiting various participants (note: the site contact person may have recommendations about the best ways to do this).
- The spotter and handler should be prepared for unexpected challenges based on participants, location and time of visit.
- The spotter will manage time and give an update prior to the visit end.
- At the conclusion of a visit, team members should thank participants and site contact person (note: participants often appreciate the opportunity to thank handlers and dogs as well).



Chapter 8: Visitation Sites and Events Overview

Visitation sites

Visitation sites are where our dogs provide participants with unconditional love include schools, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, veterans' homes, and so on. Please note that visitation sites do not include private homes or residences.

When a potential visitation site expresses interest in receiving a visit from our dogs, the regional coordinator typically:

- Meets with the facility.
- Spends time getting to know what the goals are for the facility.
- Establishes frequency of visits and types of clients to be visited.
- Based on this information, the Regional Coordinator can then pair the appropriate teams.

Community Events

- Events are where HPCD has a booth/table to provide public awareness about our organization. We use these events to also recruit new members, handlers, dogs and spotters. Members can visit the "Members Area" of the HPCD website www.heartsandpawscomfortdogs.org to sign up for special events. These events are frequently fundraising events for local Cape Cod nonprofits such as Cape Kid Meals, Sampson Fund and the Cape Cod Family Pantry. It is a requirement of the HPCD organization that each member attend at least 2 events each year. In previous years, we have attended 12-15 events per year, so there are plenty of opportunities to participate.

Some events HPCD participates in are:

- Holiday Strolls
- Home and Garden Show
- Hounds of Highfield Hall
- Bark in the Park at the Cotuit Kettleers

Volunteer Scheduling Pro software

Volunteer Scheduling Pro (VSP) is HPCD's signup software system, designed to schedule, manage and engage volunteers. Each member will be given login information after participating in orientation.

If you have an [iOS](#) or [Android](#) device, you can also use the VSP mobile app.

Once you enter your web terminal username and password to log in and open the VSP app, you can see all your scheduled dates, request and accept subs, and update your profile.



Chapter 9: Best Practices for Member Communication

Schedules

For consistency, the sites we visit on a regular schedule have at least two assigned handler/dog teams along with at least one spotter per team. If a replacement is needed, the member needs to request a substitute using VSP and email their regional coordinator.

Meetings

Member meetings are held every month April-July and may be held every other month for the remainder of the year, on the third Monday at 6:30 p.m. Prior to a meeting, everyone gets an email reminder with an agenda along with a Zoom link for those who wish to attend remotely.

New member orientation

New members will be contacted about the requirement to participate in an orientation session. This session is held at the Dennis Memorial Library and will review rules, member logistics and the history of HPCD.

Website

A wealth of information can be found on the HPCD website:
www.heartsandpawscomfortdogs.org.

Members

Members can log into a secure portion of the website to gain access to many links full of helpful information. They can check on confirmed visitation sites and sign up to help at events.

Some of the links available to assist members are:

- Member contact information
- Committees and their roles
- Documents (meeting minutes) and handouts
- Visitation site information

Nonmembers

Nonmembers can learn how our dogs help fill a special need in our community. Anyone who is interested can fill out a form on HPCD's main website to learn more about our organization and our site visits. Once a prospective member completes an initial interest form on the website they will be contacted by both email and phone by someone from the membership committee.



Chapter 10: Board of Directors

The board meets routinely to develop strategic initiatives, assess progress on various goals and problem-solve areas of concerns initiated by members or venue locations. Board members have a two to three-year term.

The HPCD board of directors include the following roles:

President:

- Presides over all board and member meetings.
- Keeps the board and members aware of progress being made on various goals as well as initiating discussions on future plans.

Vice presidents:

- Oversee various operational tasks to support progress in meeting goals.

Treasurer:

- Has general charge of the financial affairs of the organization.
- Ensures full and accurate accounts are kept of all assets, fees/dues as well as the disbursement of funds raised for other nonprofit organizations.

Secretary:

- Keeps track of all records and documents unless otherwise delegated to members of the group.
- Provides timely meeting minutes.

Additional Directors and Coordinators:

- Regional coordinator(s) are primarily responsible for setting up visitation sites and coordinating participating teams.
- Directors include committee chairs.

Committees overseen by the board:

Marketing

The marketing committee (MRC) creates awareness of HPCD's mission and excellent work by developing marketing campaigns, promoting events, creating advertising, posting on social media platforms, and maintaining the website.

Membership

The membership committee (MC) increases membership through recruitment, welcomes new members, facilitates onboarding, including orientation, initial connection with regional coordinators and website and VSP member access.



Education

The education committee (EC) provides additional educational experiences to support HPCD's mission at member meetings. It also distributes an annual survey to all members to identify areas of interest including dog health, dog care at home, dog stimulation, members sharing recent visitation experiences, and tips for handlers when a visit is challenging. In addition, the EC may identify potential speakers from other organizations using comfort dogs.

Mentoring

The Hearts and Paws mentorship program's goal and purpose will be to help make each member's experience as enjoyable, rewarding, and successful as possible. By connecting a new member with a more experienced member there will be the opportunity for connection and sharing their knowledge and experience to foster comfort while navigating the opportunities at Hearts and Paws.

Components of the Mentorship Program include:

- Mentor training.
- Mentor selection by the Mentee (Mentor profiles will be provided)
- Mentor/Mentee socials.
- Survey participants to check on the ongoing success of the program and ways to improve engagement.
- Opportunities for Mentees to eventually become Mentors and help future new members.

Community Events

The community events committee (CEC) seeks out local events that they think would be a good fit for members of HPCD to attend. It coordinates the events, including organizing volunteers and working with the event sites to finalize logistics. The CEC is also tasked with pursuing sponsors for our scheduled events.

Compliance Committee

The compliance committee (CC) seeks to ensure all requirements are observed by members. The CC routinely maintains member attestation forms, dog vaccinations, documentation and member gear tracking.



Chapter 11: Liability Insurance and Administrative Expenses

All members pay an annual membership dues of \$75.00. The dues are collected for four purposes:

- Support the expenses associated with HPCD technology and website, www.heartsandpawscomfortdogs.org
- Liability insurance
- Marketing and administrative expenses
- HPCDs Identity gear (t-shirts, dog bandanas, badges)

All members and dogs visiting HPCD-approved facilities are covered under HPCD insurance, upon obtaining a Certificate of Insurance naming the facility. This coverage only applies to the actual scheduled visit, date and time.

The HPCD insurance, provided by Liberty Mutual Insurance, covers members for bodily injury or property damage due to the performance of a visit by a volunteer. Paid professionals or employees of sites being visited by an HPCD team during their employment are not covered under our policy.



Chapter 12: Website Overview

HPCD's website, www.heartsandpawscomfortdogs.org, is easy to use. Once you log onto the website you will find the "Members Area" providing you with useful information and guidance on a variety of topics.

Once new members pay their annual dues, the webmaster will send you an email with your login information. The topic areas on the website are listed below and should address many of the questions you may have.

Event signup

- This is where you can sign up as a participant in an upcoming community event.

Group calendar

- This calendar contains all scheduled visits, meetings, orientation sessions and events.

Member contact information

- If you need to reach another member, you can find their contact information here.

Need something?

- This is a useful resource to identify the correct point person and their contact information to discuss topics such as visits, dog training questions, scheduling issues, etc.
- Feel free to suggest a new subject if you think it would be useful to others.

Committees & roles

- If you are curious about who heads up our various committees and what their functions are, you can explore that here.

Documents & handouts

- There are several resources gathered here, including an archive of past meeting minutes, tips on dog training and care, and free downloads of member Carol Miller's two books on dog training.
- Be sure to check out the "Dangerous Foods" and "Dog Body Language" handouts.

Visitation site information

- Here you can find the names and contact details for the various locations we serve.

Request reimbursement

- If you have made an authorized purchase for HPCD and need to be reimbursed, here is the place to find that information.



Appendix: Glossary and Resources

American Kennel Club

Founded in 1884, the American Kennel Club (AKC) monitors and addresses canine legislation that impacts dog ownership. It protects the rights of dog ownership and ensures the laws governing dog ownership and breeding are reasonable. It offers a wide range of educational materials, policy resources and assistance to dog owners, club/community leaders and policy makers. The Canine Good Citizen designation (CGC) is 10-skill test teaching good manners to dogs and responsible ownership for owners. CGC is required for all those dogs used in HPCD visits.

Types of visitation dogs

Comfort dogs

Comfort animals may work during an active crisis. They offer a calming distraction. Comfort dogs often work with a variety of public facilities, such as nursing homes, schools and veterans' homes, to provide an opportunity for a physical encounter supporting the comfort of the participant.

Service dogs

A service dog is trained to perform tasks and do work that eases their handlers' disabilities. Working as part of a team with their disabled partners, service dogs help them attain safety and independence. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects the rights of people with disabilities to be accompanied in public places.

Therapy dogs

Therapy dogs are trained to provide affection, comfort and support to people often in hospital settings, retirement homes, nursing homes, schools, libraries etc. Therapy dogs are trained and certified by expert trainers/organizations.