

Coton de Tulears as Therapy Dogs

This guide has been written by one of our committee members who has a number of Coton de Tulears who are therapy dogs. She provides information regarding:

1. What is a therapy dog?
2. The benefits therapy dogs provide;
3. What makes a good therapy dog?
4. Cotons as therapy dogs; and
5. How to get involved.

What is a therapy dog?

Therapy dogs enrich the lives of people by providing comfort, help and support to people who need it. Some people don't have family and friends to visit so they can feel very isolated and lonely. Some people are disabled and can't do things most people take for granted. For these people, a visit from a therapy dog can be the highlight of their week. Therapy dogs also visit hospital wards, care homes, schools, universities and even airports to help calm worried passengers.

The benefits therapy dogs provide

The physical and mental health benefits of therapy dog visits are well known and include: helping people to feel calm; lowering anxiety levels; decreasing agitation in dementia clients; bridging communication gaps – everyone loves talking to pets; and decreasing feelings of depression. It has also been found that petting a dog can help people physically relax; stabilise blood pressure; reduce the risk of heart disease, heart attacks and strokes. Petting a dog can diminish physical pain and releases many mood boosting hormones (oxytocin and dopamine) and decrease the stress hormone, cortisol.

What makes a good therapy dog?

A good therapy dog is one who likes people and fuss but can be trusted to sit and stay quietly while their owner has a conversation, who won't mind being stroked and fussed over and who just loves people of all ages. It's also fun if the dog can do tricks like give a paw, spin in a circle and maybe even roll over. Clients love seeing a well-behaved dog who loves seeing them. Sounds just like a Coton doesn't it? And this makes them just perfect as therapy dogs.



Cotons as therapy dogs

My four Cotons have all been assessed and we volunteer to visit a secure school for teenagers with mental health problems as well as our local adult mental health wards. As I get dressed in my uniform and put on the dogs' therapy kerchiefs, their excitement mounts and they can't wait to get going.

How to get involved

Cotons really love visiting their therapy clients, so why not contact your local group and get involved? There are several charities who do dog therapy visiting including large, national organisations like Pets As Therapy, Canine Concern and Therapy Dogs Nationwide as well as local ones like Essex Therapy Dogs, so to find a suitable one, you can just Google 'dog therapy'.

