

# H.A.B.I.T

Human-Animal Bond in Tennessee



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT H.A.B.I.T.



### Should all H.A.B.I.T. animals exhibit one set of behavioral standards?

No, but there are some general characteristics that H.A.B.I.T. evaluators look for to ensure that the animals will not only enjoy the visits but will also be beneficial to

the clients they are visiting. At a minimum, your animal must enjoy receiving attention from strangers; cats should be comfortable in a carrier or in the owner's arms. Obedience training for dogs is not required but is extremely helpful and is sometimes suggested before an animal is behaviorally approved by the evaluator.

### What are the problems that affect the behavioral evaluation?

**Jumping on people**—Regardless of the size of the animal, jumping on someone is very inappropriate behavior for a H.A.B.I.T. animal. Some people will take the behavior as a sign of aggression; it might knock someone off balance or down; elderly people, especially, can have very fragile skin that can be bruised or scratched easily.

**Mouthing**—People tend to think an animal is biting them when they put their mouth on someone's hand or arm, even if gently done. Skin can also be easily scratched or bruised when this happens.

**Vocalization**—Dogs that bark or vocalize can intimidate people or can just be a noisy nuisance.

**Slobbering/Shedding**—Many dog breeds naturally salivate a lot; the owner must be prepared by bringing a clean towel and frequently wiping the animal's mouth because people generally do not enjoy being slobbered on! Most animals shed, but brushing immediately prior to the visit can help. If your animal tends to shed a lot, be prepared to bring a lint brush or masking tape and offer to remove the hair from clothing. Small dogs, cats, or rabbits can be kept on their own towel.

**Disinterest/alooness**—Some animals really are not interested in receiving attention from others, which can affect how enjoyable your visits are. You might feel that you are forcing your animal to do something they are not interested in, and we do not want to put either you or the animal under undue stress.

**Fearfulness**—If your dog exhibits any signs of being afraid of the facility or clients, you must leave the premises immediately. Fearfulness can turn into aggression. If your animal shows signs of stress (e.g., undue panting, tucked tail, avoidance of people, looking for a place to escape, etc.), leave immediately.

### H.A.B.I.T. Human-Animal Bond in Tennessee

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THE UNIVERSITY of  
**TENNESSEE** **UT**  
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### **What kind of human H.A.B.I.T. volunteers make good partners with their animals?**

The majority of H.A.B.I.T. facilities involve the elderly—in nursing homes, rehabilitation facilities, hospitals, etc. A H.A.B.I.T. human volunteer should be comfortable initiating conversations with elderly people who may be depressed, sick, handicapped, or mentally incapacitated in some way. The human volunteers must be able to commit not only the time for the visits (no more than an hour) but be willing to bathe and/or groom their animal before each visit. A one-hour visit usually takes at least one hour of preparation and travel time.

### **Can my children, spouse, or friend accompany me on my visits?**

Only with prior approval from the facility and the experienced H.A.B.I.T. volunteer (PMC) who is working with you can other adults accompany you on your visits. Generally, it is not appropriate to take children on H.A.B.I.T. visits. H.A.B.I.T. is designed so that the animal is the focus for therapeutic change. Children, a spouse, or friends are not covered under our liability insurance.

### **Is there a H.A.B.I.T. dress code?**

**Yes**—All H.A.B.I.T. animals must wear or display their scarf! For the human volunteer, we ask that you dress comfortably and appropriately for the facility you visit. You and your animal represent H.A.B.I.T., and we ask that your appearance reflect well on the professionalism of our organization.

### **Can I visit any facility on the H.A.B.I.T. list or facilities not on the list?**

**No**—You will be assigned to visit one facility. Some of our volunteers visit two different facilities, but they have been approved and oriented to each facility. If you wish to visit another H.A.B.I.T. facility, you must contact your PMC member or call the H.A.B.I.T. office for information on the appropriate procedure. You



must contact a facility that is not on the H.A.B.I.T. list directly if you wish to visit there. Your animal may not wear the H.A.B.I.T. scarf in this instance, and you are not covered under H.A.B.I.T.'s liability insurance.

### **If I have two approved H.A.B.I.T. animals, can I take them together on a visit?**

**No**—One human volunteer must accompany one animal volunteer. If you have two H.A.B.I.T. animals, you can take one on one week and the other on the next, but you cannot take them both on one visit.

### **What is expected of my animal on visits?**

We expect your animal to be clean, well-groomed, free of external parasites, well-mannered, and willing to receive pats, hugs, and admiring looks. We expect animals (and human volunteers) to understand if someone seems to be afraid of them or does not want to admire or touch them. We expect your animal to not jump on people, to not be too noisy, and to not lick or kiss.

### **Does my animal have to be a purebred?**

H.A.B.I.T. evaluates only dogs, cats, and rabbits, and they are not required to be purebred. In fact, most of our volunteer animals are not purebred.

### **If I can volunteer only in the summer or know that I will be moving out of state in the near future, can I still be a H.A.B.I.T. volunteer?**

**No**—We ask that you be willing to commit at least a year of volunteer time. There is a considerable investment of time on both your part and H.A.B.I.T.'s before an animal is approved. It also takes time to become established at the facility that was chosen for you. It is not feasible to go through the process unless you can anticipate being able to commit to a long-term period of volunteering.



# MAGIC IN THE CLASSROOM: DOGS AND KIDS

by Vicki McKernan



Ten out of sixteen. That's how many years I had a dog in my classroom during my years as a teacher, but then it was time to retire. As I packed up, boxed up, and calculated how many kids I'd taught and papers I'd graded, the strongest memories all centered around a dog. A black labrador/golden cross. I acquired her as an eight-week-old puppy from Canine Companions for Independence to raise and train as a service dog in the classroom. An understanding principal and supportive parents allowed Keric to stay in the room all day with my fifth graders. They were to teach her manners. I had no idea that wiggly puppy would teach them more about life than they would teach her.

Weeks turned into months, and simple commands turned into complex ones. The dog learned, and the children had gained a loyal friend. Keric became part of UT's Ruff Reading program, spending time with my classroom kids as well as students in other classes. She always greeted the kids with a wagging tail (whether they had done their homework or not). She understood their moods, welcomed their hugs, and loved them back with an unconditional faithfulness. I began to

realize that the dog was good medicine for a child's mind and his/her heart.

I guess it was obvious to others in the school, too. Soon, Ruff Reading in my school grew to include eight other dogs who came for weekly visits in other classrooms. There were dogs in the Kindergarten wing, a dog in the LRE classroom (a class for disabled students), and in fifth grade. Our visiting dogs brought smiles to those they passed in the halls, a listening ear to students learning to read, and, sometimes, just a silent, trusted friend to confide in.

H.A.B.I.T. volunteer Joan Cohn has visited a Kindergarten class for many years with her dogs, and she knows that kids "...will tell a dog anything." The dog provides a nonjudgmental ear as well as unconditional love."

Our school was soon known as "the school with all the H.A.B.I.T. dogs," and people would ask questions about the Ruff Reading program. They'd wonder how volunteers were trained or if

the dogs were a special breed or had received behavior lessons. We would tell them the truth, which was also the simplest of answers: 1) The volunteers are not specially trained to handle their dogs. They are compassionate people who willingly share their time and their dog with others. 2) The dogs come in all shapes and sizes. They're AKC'ers and Heinz 57 varieties. These four-legged volunteers have usually had some basic obedience lessons either at home or in a class but nothing fancy. And, finally, they all love kids (both the humans and the dogs).

The success of dogs in the classroom does not come entirely from the volunteer, but from the desire of the children and the dog for each other's companionship. It is not so much what we "do," but what we "leave." When volunteers leave the classrooms they leave children who have felt



loved by sharing time with a dog. They've created seeds of compassion for animals in the children. They've nurtured social, academic, and emotional areas in the students over books or in conversation. So as I pack my old classroom things in boxes for the attic, it's not surprising that most of them are pictures and stories of my students and my H.A.B.I.T. dog...both of which were treasures.

## Internal Medicine Rounds

*for Nash and Karen*

His saunter calms—no rush  
from prior appointments, mind  
halfway toward being somewhere else.  
Eye contact occurs without distraction.  
Faces rise and shine in greeting,  
uncharted moons he might howl under,  
gaze without ever looking away.  
Unchecked, pulse rates lower.  
Uncuffed, blood pressure flutters down.  
Without words he teaches compliance,  
how to surrender to his white-coated body,  
stay and heal wrapped in thick-furred presence.  
A therapy dog schooled in instinct, he restores them  
for the work of being human,  
spreads his lesson of being.

Here.

Now.

*Donna Doyle*



## Save the Date!

H.A.B.I.T. will have its fundraiser once again at the Knoxville Museum of Art. The event will take place on March 31, 2015. More information is forthcoming as plans are finalized.

We look forward to seeing everyone!

## DONATIONS

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## In Memory

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