Read With Me™

Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program
Special Initiative
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Therapy Animal Program Contact Information
Pet Partners
345 188th Ave SE, #200
Bellevue, WA 98005
www.petpartners.org
425-679-5530
operations@petpartners.org
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WELCOME!

As a Pet Partners volunteer, you have a wide variety of ways to make a difference in your community. Reading programs are one option that continues to gain popularity nationwide. While you participate in Read With Me™ visits, all Pet Partners policies and procedures still apply, but this handbook goes into more detail about the best practices that support safe and effective reading visits.
Understanding Terminology

The terms that are used in therapy animal work can be a bit confusing, but as a well-trained volunteer and Pet Partners handler, you should have an understanding of the kind of work that you and your animal are doing. Let’s take a closer look at some examples to help clarify how these terms might be applied within the Pet Partners Read With Me™ program.

As you’ll recall from the Pet Partners Handler Course, the Pet Partners Handler Student Guide or the Pet Partners website (petpartners.org/learn/terminology), animal-assisted interventions (AAI) is the umbrella term for a variety of volunteer activities that you might participate in. Read With Me™ supports opportunities in all three types of AAI: animal-assisted activities (AAA), animal-assisted therapy (AAT), and animal-assisted education (AAE).

AAA

Animal-assisted activities provide opportunities for motivational, educational and/or recreational benefits to enhance quality of life. Although meaningful educational outcomes might result from these activities, they aren’t formally measured by a professional such as a teacher or speech therapist, or they can’t be directly attributed to the activities.

Examples of AAA

- A parent and her child are checking out books at the local library while a therapy animal reading event is being held. The parent signs up her child to read with a therapy animal for 15 minutes, because it looks fun and encourages the child to read. The child enjoys it so much that they plan to come back next month for the same event.
- A homeless shelter for families has a designated “animal reading room” where children can stop by and read to a therapy animal for 20 minutes once a week. In addition to giving children who live in the shelter an opportunity to practice their reading skills, these reading visits also help reduce some of the stress of staying in a shelter.
AAT

Animal-assisted therapy is a goal-oriented, planned, structured and documented therapeutic intervention that’s directed by health and human service providers as part of their profession.

Examples of AAT

► A child life specialist at a hospital wants a therapy guinea pig handler to read a story to a pediatric patient while a procedure is being performed. The child life specialist has the child rate his pain both before and after the procedure, to measure how effective the reading session was at reducing the child’s pain.

► A social worker at an at-risk teen program for runaways wants a therapy dog handler to read the teens a story about an abused dog and then tell the story of her own dog, which she had rescued from a neglect situation. The teens are instructed to rate how they feel before the story is read. Afterward, the social worker has them write down any similarities between the dog’s story and their own lives, and then they rate how they feel again.

AAE

Animal-assisted education is a goal-oriented, planned and structured intervention that’s directed by a general education or special education professional. The focus is on academic goals, pro-social skills and cognitive functioning, and student progress is both measured and documented.

Examples of AAE

► A fifth grade teacher invites several local therapy rabbit teams to his classroom to talk about the species and the best practices that are involved in owning a rabbit. One of the handlers also reads the students a fun story about P.J. Funnybunny by Marilyn Sadler. After the presenters have finished, the students are given a short quiz to gauge how much they learned about rabbits and taking care of them.

► A special education teacher establishes a fluency reading goal that a student will read the same books to a therapy animal every week for 5 weeks. The teacher measures and records the student’s progress.
Checking for a Good Fit

Pet Partners therapy animal teams that have passed their team evaluation may volunteer in settings that align with their qualification rating. It’s the responsibility of handlers to ensure that any setting that they volunteer in is a good fit for both their animal and themselves. Reading programs are a great way to volunteer, but you should take the time to make sure that you’ve picked a setting and age group that suit you and your animal.

Why Read With Me™?

Here are some reasons for participating in the Read With Me™ program:

► The handler and animal both enjoy children.
► The animal works best in a quiet environment, such as a library.
► The animal works well in a more active setting, such as a school.
► The animal is slowing down a bit because of age and would benefit from less walking during visits.
► The team has visited with other populations, and the handler would like to try something new, to keep the visiting experience fresh for the animal.
► Research indicates that reading with a child while a therapy animal is present positively influences a child’s reading skills. In addition, it can boost a child’s self-esteem and improve attendance, hygiene and confidence. It’s rewarding to be part of this process!
► It’s a unique volunteer opportunity that parents who are registered with Pet Partners can do at their child’s school.
► Reading at a local library or in another venue is a great way to get to know people in your community.

Read With Me™ Handlers

In general, handlers who are successful as part of the Read With Me™ program have some common traits:

► They enjoy reading. They get excited about books, characters and stories, and that enthusiasm for reading rubs off on younger readers.
► Their reading skills are at a higher level than those of the children that they want to read with.
► They like children, and enjoy making age-appropriate conversation and interacting with them.
They have direct experience living, working or volunteering with children, and understand that volunteering with youth involves unique challenges and rewards.

**Tip:** If you haven’t spent much time with children, consider gaining some experience (without your animal) before you start volunteering. If possible, observe other teams that work with children, so that you know what to expect before you make a volunteer commitment.

They have the patience to positively redirect an active child. The following are fairly typical examples of situations that you might encounter when working with children:

- A child picks out a book but decides that it’s boring within the first few pages. She goes through several more books before settling down.
- A child has a runny nose, and although he’s offered a tissue, he absentmindedly continues to use his hand to wipe his nose and then pet your animal. Patience is a must, as is hand sanitizer!

They’re comfortable setting appropriate boundaries for a child’s interactions with themselves and their animal. They consistently practice YAYABA™ (You Are Your Animal’s Best Advocate) and can tell a child “no” when appropriate, even if this disappoints the child.

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**from the field**

**Sharon and Herbie the Goldendoodle**

Reading is one of my passions! I love it when the child who’s sharing a book with Herbie pleads to finish just one more story when the time is up, and then tries to get back in line to read to another animal. That child will have a rich and interesting life!
Is There an Age Group That You’d Rather Read With?
This list provides just a quick snapshot of the developmental stages of children. Although every child is unique, this information might give you a sense of the age group that you and your animal would most enjoy working with.

**Four year olds** are chatty, uncoordinated and constantly moving, and have short attention spans.

A 4-year-old girl crawls over to the books on the blanket, grabs one and then sits with her legs straight out, patting the dog on the head while telling all about her new shoes. Before she has finished reading the first book, she closes it, crawls back over to the other books and grab a different one to read.

**Five year olds** are active, and are focused on rules and routines. They love to “help” out.

A 5-year-old boy settles down on the reading blanket by lying on his stomach next to the rabbit. He focuses on petting the rabbit but is then distracted by someone at the door. He stands up to get a better look and then quickly sits down. He tries to “help” the handler collect all the books at the end of the story.

**Six year olds** can be loud and active, are fairly competitive, ask a lot of questions, enjoy friendships and have tender feelings.

A 6-year-old boy is sitting in a chair reading to a miniature horse. The story is about a horse that has no friends. The child feels really sad about that and pets the horse that he’s reading with, wondering aloud whether real horses have friends. A minute later, he’s chatting away about the great time that he had playing ball at recess that day with his classmates.

**Seven year olds** might be a little shy. They like an organized environment, need a lot of encouragement, struggle with their sense of who they are and enjoy using their hands.

A 7-year-old girl slowly walks over to the guinea pig that she’ll be reading with. Her parent encourages her to pet the guinea pig, but the girl is hesitant and unsure. She quietly sits down next to the guinea pig, reads to it and, at the end, tentatively pets it before she leaves.

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**The Right Age**
Keep in mind that children at different ages act differently. Although your animal might not enjoy reading with preschoolers, it might enjoy reading with older children. And don’t forget adult reading programs may also be an option!
**Eight year olds** are always in a hurry, enjoy simple jokes, might have difficulty following limits that are set and enjoy working with others.

An 8-year-old boy skips over to the cat that he’ll be reading with. He pets the cat harder than what the handler showed him, so the handler shows him again. But instead of petting the cat again, the boy goes over to the books and begins looking through them. He grabs a book that has a cat and a mouse on the cover, and then turns to the handler to ask, “Do you know what cats like to eat on a hot day?” When the handler says that she doesn’t know, the boy giggles, “Mice cream, of course!” He then starts reading the book to the cat.

**Nine year olds** can be very competitive, don’t hesitate to express concerns or criticism, are moody at times and need to have directions stated clearly.

A 9-year-old girl is excited to read with a parrot. She asks the handler whether the parrot can sit on her shoulder, but when the answer isn’t what she wanted to hear, she starts a “campaign” to try to get her way. When she’s politely redirected to pet the parrot instead, she pouts a little before starting to read a book.

**Ten year olds** are experiencing growth spurts, can easily fly off the handle, enjoy joining clubs, sports teams or groups for other activities, have a strong sense of right and wrong, and work well with others.

A 10-year-old boy in a baseball uniform approaches to read with a dog. He informs the handler that reading at school is for little kids, but that he decided to come over because he loves dogs. He says that he picked the biggest dog to read to, because the little kids might be afraid of it, but he isn’t. The book that he chooses is about a boy who cheated in a baseball game. After reading the story to the dog, he says that the boy should have been kicked off the team, because it wasn’t fair to the other players.
Read With Me™ Animals

Although you might think that nothing sounds more fun than spending time with children, you also need to consider your animal’s preferences. Animals will communicate their preferences for populations that they enjoy visiting, and as the handler, you need to watch for these cues.

I Know That My Animal Likes Children, Because. . .

► It displays relaxed body language when a child approaches, and it remains calm and in control. Freezing or moving away from the child usually indicates anxiety or fear.

► It shows interest in interactions with children by:
  ● Moving closer and initiating contact.
  ● Staying facing the child, with its head up.
  ● After an initial interaction, remaining engaged or nearby.

► It has a positive history of being gentle around children at home and in other settings.

To some extent, you might be able to continue to socialize your animal around children, increasing its comfort and confidence. But remember: as a handler, it’s your responsibility to put your animal’s needs and preferences before your own. If your animal consistently displays behavior that indicates that it isn’t at ease, calm, relaxed or excited when visiting with children, it might not be enjoying itself. By continuing to visit with children, you’re pushing your animal out of its comfort zone. Not only does this present a safety risk, but it can also erode the trusting relationship between you and your animal.

Activity

Ask a friend or family member to use a cell phone to record interactions between your animal and children at a local pet store or park. (Be sure to obtain the parent’s permission first.) Replay the video, and watch your animal’s reaction to the visit. Be objective, and observe the animal’s body language for stress indicators. What parts of visiting with children does it seem to enjoy most? What situations seem to cause anxiety or discomfort? What things did you do that made a noticeable difference in your animal’s comfort during the interaction?
Where to Visit

The next most important step is to carefully consider what settings are best for you and your animal. It takes a responsible and selfless handler to put his or her animal’s preferences before his or her own, but that’s a critical component of YAYABA™. As a Pet Partners therapy animal team, you have a qualification rating as a result of your team evaluation. Be sure to carefully review potential volunteer settings to make sure that they’re appropriate for you as a team.

Even if you’re a complex-rated team, you might want to start in a more predictable environment when you begin doing reading visits. It’s much better to start off conservatively, so that you can make sure that your animal has a positive experience and wants to keep participating in reading programs. Otherwise, you risk jumping in too deep and having an experience that makes your animal unwilling to go back.

When to Volunteer in a Predictable Reading Environment

Your Animal Has Limited Experience as a Therapy Animal.
By definition, predictable environments are less volatile than others, because of either staff participation or activity levels. Regardless of your qualification rating, predictable environments can be a great place to get started, so that you can build your confidence.

As a Handler, You Have Limited Experience Doing Therapy Work.
Working with children can be a bit like rubbing your stomach and patting your head at the same time, because you have to concentrate simultaneously on your animal and the child that you’re working with, maintaining constant vigilance. Practicing in a more predictable setting helps build the team’s skills, and therefore helps prepare it for visits in higher-energy environments in the future.

Your Animal Likes Children but Doesn’t Love Them.
A quieter environment might help build up an animal’s enthusiasm and confidence around children.
Your Animal Is Young.
In general, a predictable environment presents fewer distractions for a young animal. Reading one on one with a child for short periods of time in a predictable setting is a great way to introduce a young animal to the experience.

Your Animal Is Small, Fragile or in Its Senior Years.
For some animals, a quiet, one-on-one reading session with a child will be a more comfortable and safer environment.

Your Animal Has a Shorter Visiting Threshold.
In general, predictable environments are smaller venues. There might be more control over the schedule than at larger venues. There also might be more opportunities for you to be proactive by customizing the reading schedule to the amount of time that best suits your animal’s needs.

Where Do I Find a Predictable Reading Environment?
If a predictable environment is right for you, consider these possible options.

Libraries
In general, libraries are fairly quiet and calm, and usually involve one-on-one interactions in a controlled environment. There’s a lot of support from the staff and/or library volunteers, who can help you select books, set up a registration table and facilitate logistics.

Tutoring Programs
Learning centers are usually quiet but often have limited space. The reading material will be assigned by the instructor and might involve goals. The therapy animal team works one on one with a child.

Bookstores
Children’s story hours are usually held during the day, either during the week or on weekends. They’re designed more for preschool-aged children. Depending on when the event is and the popularity of the program, there might be a handful of children present or a larger group. The story is usually selected by the staff, which reads it out loud to the children. The parents are with their children, which helps prevent unwanted behaviors.
Children’s Hospitals
Some of the larger children’s hospitals might have established libraries where patients can check out books, DVDs and other materials. The setting is usually a smaller space, where staff is present and a relative is often in attendance with the child. Patients and/or their siblings who schedule a time to read might have to cancel with little advance notice, because of the nature of a hospital setting.

Adult Programs
Although most reading programs are for children, don’t overlook programs that serve adults. Check out whether any day programs for adults in your community incorporate literacy programs, or start one yourself!

When to Volunteer in a Complex Reading Environment

Your Animal Has Had Frequent Exposure to Children.
You might have brought your animal to visit with children in the past, or your lifestyle might often bring it into contact with children. For example, you might attend children’s sports practices or games, or fundraising events such as walkathons for children’s causes. Or you and your animal might just have regular exposure to neighborhood children in the course of your normal daily routine.

Typically, an animal that has a positive history of frequent exposure to children will easily adapt to a complex reading environment.

Your Animal Has Experience With High-Energy Environments.
These environments might include any type of show ring, 4-H shows, county or state fairs, backpacking, carting, agility, hunting, nose work, and obedience or conformation competitions, to name a few. In general, animals who have experience with these environments have been desensitized to a lot of auditory and visual stimuli.

Even if your animal usually does well in stimulating environments, be sure to assess whether a children’s reading program is good a fit for it.

Your Animal Is a Retired or Career-Change Assistance Animal.
Service, hearing and guide animals have worked in and been desensitized to many complex environments as part of their training. They might enjoy having a revised job description that involves shorter periods of activity as they age, especially if they enjoy children.
You’re a Seasoned Team That Has Visited in Multiple Environments.
In this case, you’ve done a lot of work with your animal to make sure that it’s reliable, predictable and controllable in many different settings. A rich visiting history can be a great confidence booster to animals.

Even if a complex environment is a good fit for your animal, you should assess whether reading with children is something that it would enjoy.

Where Do I Find a Complex Reading Environment?
If a complex environment is right for you, consider these possible options.

Elementary Schools
Expect the unexpected! There might be crowded hallways, unscheduled fire drills, loudspeaker announcements, “snacks” on the floor, quick movements and classroom pets. Many schools host a Scholastic book fair that includes an open house for families in the evening. This is a good time to have reading visits with children in a separate room nearby.

Educational Presentations for Community Groups
Scouts, religious youth groups, facilities that serve special needs children, and more, might be interested in having you and your animal come read a story to their group and talk a bit about therapy animals and what’s involved with the training process. Depending on the facility, the room that you’re in could have people walking through it during the program and might also be noisy. In general, the environment for presentations outside of schools isn’t as structured as a classroom setting.

Preschool Programs
This is a very high-energy environment. There’s a lot of constant movement, loud cries or yelling, children who have difficulty following directions and children with short attention spans. Space is typically limited in programs like this.

Daycare Programs at Schools
Children in a wide range of ages attend these programs, and space is limited. There’s usually a lot of noise and activity, although before school is generally a lot quieter than after school.
Homeless Shelters for Families
The environment in a shelter can change from hour to hour, and space is usually an issue. It’s a high-energy environment and includes children in a wide range of ages. There might be limited staff to assist you. The children in shelters can miss a lot of school, so a reading experience not only supports them academically but can also help reduce some of their stress.

Public Events, Such as a Reading Booth at a Pet Expo
Depending on the allocated space, these environments can be either quiet or noisy. Some are held outdoors, whereas others are held indoors in a large auditorium. There might be loudspeaker announcements, interruptions by people attending the event, siblings who want to read together with the therapy animal and last-minute adjustments to the schedule to accommodate a large turnout.

from the field

Sarah and Raul the Cat
A young boy’s cat had passed away a few days before he read to Raul at the library. I told the boy that petting Raul would work a kind of magic, helping him remember his own cat and be glad of their happy times together. A month later, the boy returned to read to Raul at the library. The boy’s mother shared with me that her son had recently found a stuffed cat that looked like Raul. He had named it Raul and referred to it as his “superhero kitty,” because Raul had taken some of the hurt away and made him feel better.
Best Practices for Read With Me™ Visits

YAYABA™

What’s YAYABA™? It’s what Pet Partners handlers do best — advocating for their animal during a visit, ensuring that it’s fun for all involved, whether two-legged, four-legged, winged or hoofed. YAYABA™ stands for:

You Are Your Animal’s Best Advocate

YAYABA™ is a critical component for any safe and effective visit. Let’s see how handlers might use YAYABA™ in a reading situation with children.

Scenario 1: Alice and Taffy

My cat had read with the pre-determined number of children at the library one day, when the supervisor told me that there was another child who would like to read to Taffy. This little girl’s cat recently had to be euthanized, and she was taking it really hard. Taffy was the only therapy cat at the library that day, and the child really wanted to read to her.

Tough stuff for a child to have to deal with, I thought. But Taffy had already started twitching her tail and kneading the blanket, signs that she was done and also might need the litter box. Regretfully, I apologized to the supervisor and said that Taffy had reached her limit for today and needed to leave. I gave her Taffy’s Pet Partners trading card to give to the little girl and suggested that she have the child pick out a special cat story and read it to one of the other animals that were still available. I also asked the supervisor to give the parent information about when Taffy and I’d be there next and then left.

Should the handler have had the same response if the little girl made the request in person? Sometimes, it’s hard to practice YAYABA™, but your animal’s needs always come first.

Scenario 2: Roger and Izzy

My large dog Izzy and I had been visiting the homeless shelter for several months. We were reading one day and had just finished a story with a little boy. The supervisor said that a mother with a 3 year old was in the other room and would love to have Izzy share her story with her toddler. I hesitated, because we had set up the program for 5 to 10 year olds a few months ago, and Izzy hadn’t read with a toddler yet. Everything started off fine, until the mother got a phone call and left the room without saying a word. The toddler immediately started crying, and Izzy jumped to her feet, looking concerned. I called for the
supervisor while moving Izzy away from the toddler and stroking her ears softly. The child stopped crying, and the supervisor said that we could continue. I quietly asked her to find the mother and explained that reading with someone so young wasn’t a good fit for Izzy. I smiled and said that we’d be back next week to read with any children between the ages of 5 and 10.

► Should the handler have read with a toddler in the first place, given the fact that his animal didn’t have any experience with that age group? After guidelines are set up, should they be followed by everyone? Handlers are terrific people who want to help others, but YAYABA™ empowers handlers to say “no” in a nice way when something isn’t a fit for the animal that they’re volunteering with.

Scenario 3: Tressa and Snickers

“Please, please!” the 8-year-old boy pleaded. “I had a guinea pig once and know how to hold her!” I replied, “Why don’t you tell Chiquita about the pet that you used to have? She’d love to hear about it. If you want to pet her in her bed like this,” and I demonstrated for him, “she’ll be your best friend. Unfortunately, the rules at the bookstore are that animals stay in their beds. Would you also like to feed her a carrot?”

► Children will often say that they know how to do something, but they don’t. For all the handler knows, the child used to hold his pet guinea pig up in the air, shaking it, Giving the child another task, such as petting or feeding the animal, usually calms a child down in this situation. If a child is persistent, mentioning that something is a rule usually works too, because children understand that facilities have rules that they need to follow.
PETS™

As you’ll recall from your handler training, Pet Partners employs the PETS™ strategy to help handlers stay connected with their animal during a visit. It refers to the ways that handlers can subtly reassure, settle and support their animal so that the visit is a positive experience for everyone.

PETS™ stands for:

- **Presence**: Maintain physical closeness as well as mental presence, staying constantly aware of your animal.
- **Eye contact**: Keep your animal in your field of vision and make frequent eye contact to facilitate communication.
- **Touch**: Place a hand on your animal as a form of praise, encouragement or reassurance.
- **Speech**: Speak to your animal in a conversational and reassuring tone.

Let’s explore some Read With Me™ scenarios where handlers successfully practice PETS™ while working with children.

**Scenario 1: Shawn and Tucker**

When my dog Tucker’s ears went up after he saw a child skipping in the distance, I reached over and petted him on the shoulder to get his attention and smiled to reassure him that everything was fine. Meanwhile, the child that we were with kept reading, never noticing our silent communication.

- Children love moving, any way they can! Practice moving around your animal to desensitize it. Skip, hop, jump, spin, or make up your own movements! Make it a positive experience for your animal and a fun exercise time for you!

**Scenario 2: Mary and Tanzy**

Once, a noisy book cart came into the room while we were reading with a little girl at the library. My rabbit Tanzy startled at the movement and the noise. I stroked her ears, saying “Good bunny” in low, slow tones. I also showed the little girl how to do the same thing, which she did before we started reading a story about P.J. Funnybunny with Tanzy.

- When handlers are reassuring their animal, it’s important that they match their tone of voice to their touch. Have you ever seen a nervous handler try to calm his or her animal before their team evaluation, only to have the animal pick up on the handler’s anxiety? For example, although a handler is telling his animal, “It’s OK, it’s OK,” he says this a loud voice while his hand is patting the animal hard and fast. When this happens, the animal
becomes even more stressed, which makes the handler even more nervous. To effectively help their animal relax and stay calm, handlers need to be mindful of their own anxiety and then use a low, slow tone of voice and calm petting.

**Scenario 3: Francesca and Charlie**

As my miniature horse Charlie and I were walking to the reading room in the school that we were visiting, we got caught in the hallway with a hundred fifth graders who were coming back from a field trip. Fortunately, the school’s staff had arranged a break room where we could go if the hallway was crowded with kids. We stepped into the break room, which was empty and quiet. I stayed close to Charlie’s head, talking to him in a calm voice and softly rubbing his muzzle. When the hallway was clear of students again, we continued on our way to the reading room, where Charlie was calm and ready to read!”

If a break room or equivalent area isn’t immediately available, have your animal stand up near a wall, while you face sideways, with your feet apart and your arms outstretched, shielding your animal. Smile at the children as they walk past, and move one of your arm’s like someone directing traffic. Although the meaning of your body language should be obvious, a child might still occasionally run over to pet your animal. In this case, just say, “Sorry, you need to keep walking,” smile, and keep motioning with your arm to move the kids along. This strategy works really well in a school. However, by being proactive, finding out when passing times are and/or setting up a break room, you won’t have to use this strategy at all. This approach works even better!

**PETS™, Professionalism and Perception**

All animals should be treated with respect and kindness. During visits, therapy animal teams are in the public eye, and handlers need to keep that in mind. Manhandling an animal to reposition it on a reading blanket or “popping” the lead or leash to get an animal’s attention are examples of handling that are viewed negatively by Pet Partners and the general public.

Children in particular need to feel safe, and if they’ve experienced rough treatment by adults, they might be concerned about interacting with a team — especially if they see the handler roughly handle his or her own animal. Handlers who practice PETS™ on a regular basis reinforce a positive response from their animal, demonstrate respect for their animal and model appropriate behavior with animals for the people that they visit. At Pet Partners, we take great pride in the professionalism of our volunteers. Always strive to make your interactions with people and animals respectful.
Positioning Tips

Every species — and every individual animal — will have its own preferences about where it is in relation to the child who is reading. In general, here are the three most important things to remember:

1. The animal needs to be in a position where it can see the pictures and "read" the book.
2. The position must be safe for both the child and the animal.
3. The handler must be able to practice PETS™ throughout the entire reading session.

One popular reading position that works well for many therapy animal teams is to sit on a reading blanket, with the animal in the middle, the handler on one side and the child on the other. Everyone can see the book, the child can pet the animal while he or she is reading, and the handler is in close proximity. Note that, in this reading position, you might need to redirect a child who starts leaning or lying down on your animal or petting it too roughly.

Another position is to have the animal on one side of the handler and the child on the other. Everyone can see the book, and the child can still reach in front of the handler to touch the animal. This might be a good position to use for preschool children who want to climb all over your animal, or for a fragile or senior animal, because you can better protect the animal if it’s on the side opposite the child. This is also a good option for children who are unsure or hesitant around the animal.

If it’s difficult for you to sit on the floor, and your animal is large enough, consider using chairs or stools for both yourself and the child, and position your animal in the middle or on the opposite side of you from the reader. It’s helpful if everyone is at the same level, so that the child doesn’t feel as though you or your animal is looking down at him or her.

Some venues have carpeted steps in a reading area, and these might work well for handlers who have difficulty sitting on the floor. However, it might be difficult for a larger animal to fit comfortably on a step. Still, depending on the animal’s size, this option lets everyone see the book and possibly be on the same level too.

If the animal is small, you might want to place it on a table. However, make sure that the table is sturdy, and the mat or rug that the animal is lying on is secure and doesn’t slide. The reader and handler can sit side by side at the table, facing the animal. The animal is easily accessible to the child for petting, but it

What a View!

If your animal is likely to become distracted by activity outside a window, such as in a playground, position it accordingly.

As the handler, it’s your job to set everyone up for success.
might be more difficult to hold the book so that everyone can see it. If your animal has never been on a table before, you need to practice reading to it at home until it’s comfortable with the experience.

A small animal in a basket or bed can be placed in the handler’s lap. We don’t recommend placing it in the child’s lap. Children can become so engrossed in a story and move around excitedly as a result, that they topple the animal out of its bed. In addition, as the handler, you need to keep your hands free so that you can manage your animal. This would be difficult if you were also holding the book and turning the pages. Therefore, if you use this position, the child should hold the book and turn the pages, if possible.

from the field

Nancy and Dottie the Standard Poodle

I actually enjoy reading with kids who might be a little tentative around dogs. I’ve had this happen a few times. When my son was younger, he was petrified of any kind of dog. We actually went to a reading session at a library to try to help him overcome his fear. So, if a child is nervous around Dottie, I tell him or her about my son and how he was able to overcome his fear of dogs. I also mention that my son can’t even imagine not having Dottie in our lives now. The power of the paw!
The Three Parts of a Visit

You might recall from your handler training that there are three distinct parts to every visit: the approach, the interaction and closure. We'll now talk about those same steps in the specific context of a Read With Me™ visit.

1. Approach

This is the beginning of your team’s relationship with the child. You’re setting the tone for the visit by being welcoming and introducing your animal as a gentle new friend. Be sure to ask the child whether he or she has a pet or a favorite stuffed animal toy at home, because during the closure part of the visit, you’ll encourage the child to read to that pet or toy. Your goal is to be respectful of the child and your animal, and to develop a safe environment for visiting.

One of the goals that a handler has for the entire reading session is to help facilitate a connection between the child who’s reading and the therapy animal. Physical contact helps support this process. Therefore, handlers should ask the child whether he or she would like to pet their animal and then encourage the child to do so during the entire reading session. Handlers should also remember to practice “show and tell.” They can show the child where their animal likes to be petted and at the same time tell the child what they’re doing.

For example, you might say, “Duchess loves being scratched behind her ears, like this,” and show how to do it. “If you scratch gently just like this, she’ll be your best friend.”

If you have a larger animal, remember that its size might be intimidating to a child who’s approaching you. Consider having larger dogs lie down. If your animal is a miniature horse, llama, alpaca or potbellied pig, stand next to its head for better control and to make it easier for you to practice PETS™. Consider how you’ll proactively prevent inappropriate contact before you’ve had a chance to model the best way to pet or interact with your animal.

Younger children might be concerned about the teeth of animals of any sized that they read with. If a child is looking hesitant, you might want to position the animal so that you’re managing its head, and the animal’s back/side area is nearest the child. Instead of saying, “My animal won’t bite” (which plants the thought in the child’s head if he or she wasn’t already thinking that), try saying, “Feel how soft my cat’s fur is back here. Look, you can pet her just like this on her back and feel how fuzzy it is.” When children see that the handler has the “teeth” end, and that the animal is in control, this usually wins them over. Sometimes, it just takes time. You might find that, although children are hesitant at first, by the end of the session, they become focused more on the story and are easily petting the animal.
2. Interaction

During this part of the visit, you and your animal are reading with the child and building your animal’s relationship with him or her. In the next section, you’ll learn how you can use projection techniques to facilitate this process, by viewing the reading session through your animal’s eyes.

You can also use projection to deepen the reading process, by interjecting a few questions during the story and phrasing them as if your animal really wants to know the answers to them. You might want to prepare questions in advance. A few questions or comments that are projected through your animal and sprinkled throughout the story can help form the connection between the reader and your animal.

One of the most important messages to get across to children that you’re reading with is that your animal loves to read! Make sure that the book is held so that the animal can see the pictures. Remind the child to show the book to your animal once in a while during the story.

Most children ultimately know that the animal can’t read, but they also love to play make believe and will enjoy thinking that the animal can. Soon, the child will be asking the animal questions and pointing out something in the pictures to it. This connection between the reader and the animal is the ultimate goal.

Examples

► If the book is about basketball, you might say, “Fluffy was wondering whether you selected this book because you play basketball? Fluffy wishes that he could play, but he still enjoys watching it on TV. Let’s see what this story is about.”

► If the book is about Star Wars, you might say, “Fluffy hasn’t seen the new Star Wars movie yet. Have you? Fluffy is wondering whether this story is about the new movie. Can you tell Fluffy what you think it’s about?”

► If one part of the book takes place at an amusement park, you might comment briefly, “Fluffy is getting dizzy watching that penguin go round and round on that roller coaster! He’s wondering whether you’ve ever gotten really dizzy?”

You’ll want to spend some time planning how to launch your reading session and coming up phrases that you’ll use if you need to redirect your reader. Check out the projection strategies in the next section for some good ideas. During your session, don’t forget to watch your animal’s body language for signs that you might need to re-settle it or end the visit and practice PETS™.
3. Closure

Closure brings the reading session to a positive end for the child. You should say goodbye, let the child thank your animal and say that your animal enjoyed reading with him or her. If appropriate, let the child know when you expect to read again. You can also encourage the child to read to his or her own pet or stuffed animal at home.

Many handlers facilitate closure by passing out “tokens” or a no-monetary-value item that has their animal’s photo on it. Some ideas are bookmarks or trading cards (available at petpartners.org) It’s a nice reminder to the child that reading is fun and puts closure on the reading session!

Finally, use best practices for hand hygiene, and offer your reader some hand sanitizer along with a smile. (For more information, see the “Infection Control” section later in this handbook.)

Planning how you’ll move from the approach to the interaction to closure will give you confidence in your visits. Let’s look at a few examples to give you some ideas about how you’d like to facilitate interactions between a reader and your animal.

Scenario 1: Duchess the Yorkie

1. Approach

Child: [The child, a kindergarten girl, walks toward Duchess, who’s lying on a colorful reading blanket.]

Handler: Hi! My name is Ann, and this is my dog Duchess. She must know that you love dogs, because she’s wagging her whole body. Do you have a dog too?

2. Interaction

Handler: Can you help me get Duchess to settle down to read? Try moving your hand like I’m doing right now, and see what happens. [Duchess lies down.]

Wow, good job. She really minds you! She’s excited to read the story with you. Make sure that she can see the pictures. Let’s start reading!

3. Closure

Handler: Duchess really enjoyed reading the story with you. Here’s a little hand sanitizer for you [hands it to the child ] and a trading card with a picture of Duchess on it. Look how relaxed she is now. Duchess would love it if you came back again to read with her again sometime. Maybe you can try reading to your own dog at home this week!
**Scenario 2: Truffles the Lop-Eared Rabbit**

1. Approach
   
   **Child:** [The child, a 7-year-old girl at a homeless shelter, skips over to where Truffles is waiting in her basket.]

   **Handler:** [Holds out his hand like a stop sign toward the little girl but smiles at her too.] Slow down, please. My bunny likes people to walk near her, because she’s so little and scares easily. Her name is Truffles. You can pet her like this if you’d like to.

   **Child:** [Starts flipping Truffles’ ears up and down.]

   **Handler:** Truffles will be a lifelong friend if you pet her like this [demonstrates proper petting]. Have you ever met a bunny before?

2. Interaction
   
   **Handler:** Truffles has some of her favorite rabbit stories over there. Can you pick one out to read to her? Now that you know how to pet her, feel free to pet her during the story — especially if there are any scary parts, because it helps comfort her.

3. Closure
   
   **Handler:** We just have a few minutes left to read. Would you like to pet Truffles one last time and take a look at her photo book? Maybe you can check out some bunny books today and read them to your stuffed bunny Snuggles. Truffles wants to thank you for reading with her today. She also wants to give you this bookmark. It has her picture on it and a list of some of her favorite books!

**Scenario 3: Jinx the Long-Haired Cat**

1. Approach
   
   **Child:** [The child, a third-grade boy at a school, is excited to go to his second session in the therapy animal reading program. Jinx is in his handler’s arms, looking relaxed. The boy starts petting Jinx vigorously, even though he was instructed how to pet him last week.]

   **Handler:** School rules are that you have to pet cats like this [demonstrates]. Remember what a great job you did last week. Show Jinx that you remember how he likes to be pet. [The boy pets the cat more calmly.] Nice job remembering. When you visit your grandparents’ cat, try petting her this way, and show everyone what you learned with Jinx. Look at his tail: it’s moving a lot slower now, which shows that he likes what you’re doing.
2. Interaction
Child: [Starts skipping pages in the book and looking around the room.]

Handler: Jinx seems a bit bored by this book. Maybe you’d like to keep reading it at home? Here are several of Jinx’s favorite books. Is there one that looks interesting to you?

Child: [Selects Kat Kong by Dav Pilkey and is enthralled within a few minutes.]

3. Closure
Handler: We have a few minutes left before you have to go back to class. There isn’t time for another story, but we do have time for this kitty joke book. Would you like to see it? How about if you pick out a joke from this book to tell Jinx. He has a good sense of humor. This is a library book. If you want, you can check it out and bring it to your grandparents’ house this weekend. Then you can read it with their cat.

Child: [Tells the cat a few jokes and pets it one last time, laughing.] Hope you have a purr-r-fect week, Jinx.

Handler: Here’s a little hand wash for you to use before you go. Have fun with your grandparents’.

Scenario 4: Starbuck the Alpaca

1. Approach
Child: [The child, a 10-year-old girl at the library, walks over to Starbuck.] Wow, this is so cool. The library lets you do this? What if he poops?

Handler: [Reassures the girl that they’re “officially” at the library and are a registered Pet Partners therapy animal team with special training, which includes no “pooping” at the library, and shows her their badge.] Have you ever pet an alpaca before?

Child: [Indicates that she hasn’t.]

Handler: [“Shows and tells” how to pet Starbuck.] Do you have any animals at home, or a special stuffed toy?

Child: I have a teddy bear named Bruno from when I was little.

2. Interaction
Child: [Sits in a chair, with the handler and the alpaca right next to her, and settles in to read the library chapter book that she has chosen, Al the Alpaca: Forever Friends, by Diane Odegard Gockel. This is an age-appropriate book that she can check out to bring home, because it’s too long to finish in 15 minutes.]
Handler: [Enthusiastically] Wow, it looks like this is a true story. My alpaca loves non-fiction and hasn’t read this one yet. Let’s see what it’s about. Feel free to pet Starbuck anytime you want to during the story. He likes that.

3. Closure

Handler: Unfortunately, our time is up. It looks like your mom would like a cell phone picture. Is that OK? [After the picture is taken, the handler gives the reader a sticker that says that she read with an alpaca today.] After you finish the book that we started, be sure to return it to the library, so that Starbuck and I can finish it too. We need to find out whether Al is OK and finds his friends! Maybe you want to read it out loud to your teddy bear Bruno, just for fun? Remember to use the hand sanitizer at the desk on your way out. Thanks for reading, and have a great day!

from the field

Chris and WK the Cat

A story that I like to tell involves a little boy who said that he “likes to read in his head.” So I was thinking that he probably isn’t a very good reader, but I told him, “That’s OK. Just ask WK if you need help with any of the words, because WK knows a lot of words!” So he was reading along in his head — not a peep, quiet as a mouse — so every once in a while, I’d say something like, “Oh, WK loves this book that you chose. I think it’s one of his favorites!” or “WK can’t believe what a good reader you are.” When we were finished, his mother told me that the reading time with WK was more about overcoming his fear of cats than it was about reading, and how much she appreciated the opportunity. The boy came back last week, and we went through the whole “reading in his head” thing again, but this time, instead of being completely silent, he read in a whisper! And he’s an excellent reader! I was totally shocked that he could actually read at the level that he was reading to WK at! I’m looking forward to next time, to see whether he actually progresses to reading out loud.
Projection Strategies for Redirection

At some point during a visit — and it might be frequently — you’ll need to redirect the child that you’re reading with. One strategy that works well is to speak through the animal as if it were responding to the situation. This strategy is called projection and works well with children. It also helps build empathy between the child and the animal that he or she is reading with, deepening their bond.

The following are common situations where you might need to redirect a reader and examples of how you can use projection to achieve that.

A child starts crawling into your lap.

► “Scooby looks like he has hurt feelings because you aren’t next to him. Can you go and make him feel better?”

A child wants to hold your hand.

► “Cuddles would love it if you pet her right now. She seems to settle down when you do that.”

A child wants to pick your animal up out of its basket.

► “Fluffy loves her basket and would be really sad if she couldn’t stay in it. Would you like to feed her a carrot instead?” (Or substitute something else that the child can do.)

A child needs to use the bathroom and wants you to take her.

► “Charlie knows that there’s a rule that animals aren’t allowed in the bathroom. Let me get the supervisor’s attention, and she can take you instead.”

A child starts talking about how mean his teacher is.

► “Gumball is sorry that you feel that way. He was so excited to come and read today. Which story would you like to start with?”

A child starts petting your animal roughly.

► “Muffin will be your friend forever if you pet her like this. Let me show you” Demonstrate appropriate petting, and then say, “See how she likes that? Hear her purring? She really likes you!”
A child wants to read another book, but you told her that, unfortunately, her time is up. The child picks up a book and starts reading anyway, ignoring what you said.

► “Solo would like to show you a trick that he learned. Can you help him do it? Great! After he takes a bow, he knows that it’s time to go outside. Just put the book over there, and I’ll show you the hand signal that Solo knows for ‘take a bow.’” Demonstrate the motion, and have the child do it for the animal. Then, while walking toward the door, say, “Great job reading and getting Solo to take a bow! Solo is looking forward to reading with you next week.”

A child starts telling you about how dad hit mom really hard last night.

► “Buttercup is sorry to hear that, because it must have been upsetting. She has had some tough times too but always feels better when she reads a story. Can you help her out by reading to her now?” (For more information about how to manage comments like this, see the “Self-Disclosure” section later in this handbook.)

A child says that he’s planning to run away tonight.

► “Coco wants to know whether it’s OK to tell your teacher that, because he’s worried about you. Can we do that after we read this book? For now, Coco would like to start on this page and read from here.” (If the danger is imminent, you can also go with the child to the supervisor, and then leave, letting the two of them talk.) As you leave, say “Coco hopes to see you next week during reading time.”
Communicating Effectively With Children

When you communicate with children it’s helpful to use terms or gestures that are commonly used in their lives.

Children generally respond well if you use the word “rules” when explaining why they can’t do something that they want to do, such as feed your animal a piece of candy or take the leash from you. However, if you do need to use “it’s against the rules,” follow up with something that they can do, such as pet your animal.

Children are regularly asked to “take turns,” so if you use this term, it should be familiar to all children. You might want to request that children take turns to prevent your animal from becoming overstimulated, or so that you can better monitor their interactions with your animal. When you’re performing crowd management, children are also familiar with the term “line up quietly.”

In addition, don’t underestimate body language or gestures that children might be familiar with. For example, if some children are passing you and your animal on their way to class, and a few of them start to move in your direction, put one hand out like the crossing guard does at their school, smile brightly, and say that you hope that it will be more convenient for them to meet your animal the next time that you see each other, but for now, they need to go to class.

Many school classrooms or children’s programs will have their own visual and auditory cues that teachers or supervisors use to manage the children in their care. Examples include “criss-cross applesauce,” “hands in your lap” and when an adult raises his or her hand silently to indicate that the students should be quiet. Ask the teacher or supervisor what key phrases or gestures are already used, so that you can use them too.

Note that, if you’re presenting to a group of children, it’s best to have the supervisor or teacher help manage them, so that you can focus on your animal. However, it’s still helpful if you know the common management terms or gestures that are used there. After all, you might visit again and read with a child one on one, or there could be a substitute staff person during a future visit. The best practice is to be prepared!
Addressing Potential Challenges

For the Animal

In this section, we’ll touch on a few challenges that you might experience during a Read With Me™ visit. Each subsection will give you some hypothetical situations to consider. We’ve suggested one possible response for each, but can you think of another response that might be more appropriate for your specific animal?

Stimuli

Visits with children can involve a higher level of distraction and stimulus for your animal than other types of visits. Stop to consider these potential challenges, so that you can make informed decisions about the best places for you and your animal to visit as a Read With Me™ team. Most animals (and humans!) like having a routine and a familiar environment, but school settings and other settings that include children might present more sudden changes than other environments.

While you’re in the middle of reading a story to students in a school classroom, the class next door unexpectedly joins you, so that thirty more students are now moving into the already-full classroom.

► Be proactive, and establish guidelines ahead of time with the teacher whose class you’ll be visiting, letting him or her know that your animal responds well to no more than 30 students in a room. Before the new students sit down, tell their teacher that your animal can have only 30 students in the room, but that you’d be glad to schedule a visit to his or her class on another day.

While you and your animal are at a reading event at the library, a photographer from the local newspaper is taking flash photos of everyone reading.

► Have the librarian in charge ask the photographer not to use a flash, because it bothers your animal. The photographer should also be asked not to disturb the reading session by asking children to pose for photos.

It’s a hot day, so there’s a large fan running in the room that you’ll be visiting in. You know that the fan’s spinning motion will concern your animal.

► You’re responsible for your animal, so ask someone to move the fan to a different location or turn it off for the time that you’re visiting there.
Unexpected Sounds
There can by many interesting and unexpected sounds in a school, homeless shelter or other type of facility that serves children. For example, there might be students noisily bouncing a ball, remote control toys buzzing around, dishes clattering, bells ringing, video game noises, clapping, loud singing, yelling or crying.

Proactive handlers spend time thinking about how they’ll manage the various settings that they’ll be visiting in to best support their animal, in addition to practicing PETS™.

On the first day of a new reading program at a school, the alarm goes off, and hundreds of students — together with you and your animal — suddenly have to file out of the building for a fire drill.

► As a proactive handler, you should ask the contact person at the school whether there will be any fire drills during the scheduled reading times, and whether there will be any loud noises over the intercom (holiday parades, special programs and so on). If there will be, schedule a different time to avoid any unsettling surprises. If you’re caught in the crowd, walk out with the supervisor for your reading program, and protect your animal from being stepped on.

The room that you’re using for an afterschool reading program has a wall that’s adjacent to the gym. Children in the gym are bouncing balls against that wall, which makes loud thudding noises during the reading session.

► Let the supervisor know what the issue is, and ask whether he or she can find a different space to read in.

Other Animals
Unexpected animals might appear in any setting while you’re on a visit. For example, schools occasionally have classroom pets, or parents might bring in their animals from home for “show and tell.”

It’s important that your animal remain in control in the presence of another animal. However, for everyone’s safety, you should keep your distance from other animals.

While you’re in the middle of reading to a classroom with your animal, a parent walks in to watch your presentation, accompanied by an assistance dog in training (a 5-month-old puppy).

► To keep everyone safe and focused, ask the teacher in charge to ask the parent to either wait for his or her child in a different area of the school or sit quietly in the back of the room.
When you arrive at the library to read with children, you find out that a therapy rat has been set up right next to your therapy cat for the upcoming reading session. Yikes!

► Ask whether there’s a separate room where you can read with your cat. If there isn’t one available, have the two teams separated as much as the room allows. You could also ask the librarian whether the library has a screen, or whether a table can be set on its side to block the animals from each other’s sight.

Food and Smells
Volunteering with children can sometimes be challenging, especially if your animal is food-motivated. Some children who arrive to read with your animal might be covered in crumbs, or they might leave an unintentional “snack trail.” Others might bring a snack to the reading session, which might be a challenge for your animal.

A child wants to feed your animal some of her leftover lunch.

► Have a reply ready, such as, “Thanks, but my animal had lunch already and is full.” Or, if it’s OK to treat the animal, you could say, “My animal is only allowed to eat a certain kind of treats. I have some here. Would you like to feed it one?”

A child arrives at the reading session eating a large granola bar. The child has to miss snack time to read, so his teacher said that it was OK to bring it with him. Your animal is really food-motivated, and the reading session is for a half hour in close proximity.

► You could say, “Fido is very interested in your snack. I’m going to move him to my other side, so that you can enjoy it. Let me read you and Fido a short story first, while you finish your snack.” Alternatively, if your animal is truly having difficulty, ask the child to finish the snack right outside the door of the room that you’re in. After the reading session is over, ask the supervisor to remind the teacher that it’s difficult to have children eat while an animal is present, and see whether the child can finish his snack in the classroom in the future.

I Felt Teeth!

As a best practice when children feed your animal, place the treat on a plastic spoon or in a bowl, and have the child offer it to your animal that way.

Sometimes children who have never given an animal a treat will feel the rough tongue on their hand and think that the animal is biting them, because they don’t know the difference between a licking sensation and a biting sensation.
For the Reader

Occasionally, the child that you’re reading with will experience challenges, some of which might take away from his or her enjoyment of the experience. Remember that, in terms of educational goals, you should work with the professional who’s coordinating the visit.

**The Book Is Too Hard for the Child to Read.**
If the book that you’re using is too difficult, that can cause frustration for the reader. The Five Finger Rule can help you determine whether a particular book is too challenging. Count the number of words per page that the reader doesn’t understand, and then use the following scale.

- **0–1 unknown words:** The book is too easy.
- **2–3 unknown words:** The book is about right.
- **4–5 unknown words:** The book is too difficult.

If a child is struggling to read the words in a book, never say, “This is too hard for you,” because this might embarrass the child. Instead, try using projection. For example, say, “Fluffy isn’t sure that she likes this book; it seems a little boring. Would you mind finding another one that’s a little more exciting?”

**The Child Is a Good Reader but Doesn’t Comprehend What He or She Reads.**
Readers enjoy their Read With Me™ sessions more when they can follow along with the story. If you want to check for comprehension, one easy question that you can ask is, “Can you explain what’s happening now in the story to Fluffy, because I think she’s a bit confused?” There are children who can read really well but comprehend little of the storyline. If the reader can’t tell what’s happening in the story, you might say something like, “Fluffy thinks that the dog went into the swimming pool on purpose, to get attention. Could that be it?” Or say, “What do you think is happening in this picture. Can you describe it to Fluffy?”

By explaining a little of the thread of the story through your animal, you’ll often be able to get readers to slow down, and they then start using the pictures and the newer pace to support their comprehension of the story.

**For Whatever Reason, the Story Is Scary or Upsetting to the Child.**
Children might choose a book that’s at their reading level, but that has scary pictures or a storyline that’s upsetting to them. They might not want to admit that the book is scary or upsetting, so observe their reaction to the story. If it seems disturbing to them, try using projection. For example, say, “Do you think that Fluffy looks a bit scared during this part? I think she might be. Maybe we could try a different book?”
Promoting Safety and Limiting Risk

Working with children can be very rewarding! There are also unique challenges and safety considerations that you need to be aware of. Our goal is to keep everyone safe.

Always Be Above Reproach

Always keep your interactions above reproach. As a volunteer, you’re in a special position where trust is critical. Always be transparent in your interactions with children by allowing others to see and hear you. In this way, you’ll limit the potential for misunderstanding or, in the worst-case scenario, accusations of inappropriate conduct.

Before you begin visiting, understand the level of staff support that will be available during your reading sessions. Will staff be supervising many visiting teams or just a few? Will the designated staff person be in view at all times? What can and can’t staff assist with during your visits? Knowing these details will help you make decisions that will limit your risk. For example, if the reading session will be in a small room without other adults present, you can keep the door open and position yourself and your animal where people can see you as they walk past.

Many children love and crave physical contact, such as hugging. Make sure that you understand any policies or limitations that your facility has about volunteers’ interactions with children. As a best practice, Pet Partners recommends that you not let children sit in your lap, and that you not hug, cuddle or lie next to each other during reading sessions. Although it might be harmless, it opens you up to risk. You can still have a great reading session, even if you and the child just sit side by side.

Self-Disclosure

As you form a rapport with the children that you visit, they might want to tell you about other things in their lives or share feelings that they have. As a professionally trained volunteer, it’s important that you never make statements against a teacher or staff person in an effort to support your readers. Even simple statements such as “Mrs. Smith was wrong to take away your recess” set up a negative dynamic between you and facility staff. However, you can and should acknowledge the feelings behind the child’s disclosure. For example,
say, “It sounds like that made you angry.” If you have concerns, pass them on to the appropriate staff.

If the child expresses a more serious matter, such as intent to harm himself or herself, or others, acknowledge the feeling, but not the content of the disclosure. Handlers aren’t mandated reporters, because they’re volunteers. However, it’s a best practice to let the appropriate staff know any information that’s considered serious. For specific techniques that you can use to address sensitive information disclosures, see the “Projection Strategies for Redirection” section earlier in this handbook.

**Infection Control**

During therapy animal visits, there exists the potential to inadvertently transmit illness. Therefore, to minimize any risk to others, handlers should observe best practices when they visit with their animal. Facilities might have their own policies and procedures for many general concerns. In the event that a facility and Pet Partners have different policies about the same topic, always follow the more conservative of the two policies.

**Hand Hygiene**

Although many of the people who participate in Read With Me™ visits will be generally healthy, hand hygiene is still considered mandatory.

Offer hand sanitizer before and after anyone touches your animal. Avoid scented products, because children might be sensitive to scents or have allergies. Some facilities might have specific brands of sanitizer that they’ll provide.

If you use a gel-based sanitizer, meter the amount, because if too much is applied to a child’s hands, it will end up on your animal! Hand sanitizer sprays might also work well, but care should be taken not to get airborne hand sanitizer near anyone’s eyes, whether animal or human.

The reason for offering hand sanitizer before someone touches your animal is that there will already be a variety of bacteria on the person’s hands. For example, if someone sneezes into his or her hand a few minutes before you arrive and then pets your animal, the cold germs from that person’s hand will now be on your animal’s body. Therefore, next person who pets your animal will have direct contact with those germs.

Be prepared to visit with a child who has a runny nose or a cough. Having a tissue available and easily accessible can be helpful, but be sure to ask the child to dispose of it after use.
Handlers must cleanse their hands between visits and in accordance with Pet Partners policies. Additionally, they must perform hand hygiene after using the restroom or cleaning up after their pet.

**Allergies**
People who have any kind of allergies to animals need to be informed when an animal will be present and where it will be. Ask the facility that you’re visiting for assistance in posting signs or alerting people with allergies. Keep in mind that cat allergies are twice as common as dog allergies, so unless you obtain facility approval, you should avoid having your cat walk on the floor or climb onto furniture.

**Grooming**
Before every visit, animals should be cleaned and groomed in accordance with Pet Partners policies. Grooming products that are as scent-free and natural may be preferable because some people are allergic to certain scents.

**Barriers**
Wash reading blankets after every event to keep them clean and fresh-smelling. If you’re reading in a setting where people might have compromised immune systems, such as a hospital or skilled nursing facility, place a clean barrier, such as a towel from the facility, under your animal if it sits in a chair or on a bed. A fresh towel should be used for each new room or person that you visit, to ensure high standards of infection prevention.

**Photographs and Electronic Safety**
Handlers should refrain from taking photos of children for their own personal use. As always, our goal is to be above reproach. If you have a specific need to take photos, such as an opportunity for you and your animal to be featured on the Pet Partners website or in a newsletter, be sure to obtain prior written permission from the child’s parents or guardians, and check whether the facility has any additional policies.

Sometimes, parents at a reading event will want to take a photo of their child with your therapy animal. You can decline outright, or you can ask the parent to get just the child and the animal in the picture, and then lean a little to the side, holding the animal’s leash, while the photo is taken. This is a personal choice, but handlers should be aware that photos can end up on social media sites where they’ll have no control over the content. And remember: per Pet Partners policy, you must never give your animal’s leash to someone else, even for a photo opportunity.
If you want to communicate with a child outside of your reading sessions, this should be done through the supervisor for the program. It’s inappropriate for handlers to use social media, email, texting or other platforms to communicate directly with the children that they visit, for any reason.

Insurance Considerations

Pet Partners is proud to provide comprehensive liability insurance to all our registered volunteers who are visiting in accordance with Pet Partners policies, procedures and best practices. In order to be fully covered by Pet Partners’ CGLI policy, teams must visit as Pet Partners only and not affiliate with another organization that registers therapy animal teams or that charges a fee to participate in a similar program.

On Read With Me™ visits, you can be readily identified by wearing bandanas and vests available in our online store (https://www.shoppetpartners.org) in addition to your Pet Partners badge. For more information on your insurance coverage through Pet Partners, please review Lesson 6.7 in the Pet Partners Handler Guide.

from the field

Patti and KoKo the Husky

The very first time that my dog KoKo and I read at a library, we had an experience that hooked us on the incredible value of reading with kids. A shy first-grade girl sat down next to KoKo and asked me to read. I read one book and then picked up an easy reader and said that KoKo would love to have her read it now. The girl read that book and then another to KoKo, petting her the entire time. When we stood up to say goodbye, I noticed that the girl’s mom was quietly crying. I held onto the leash but stepped over a little to talk with the mom. I asked her if things were OK. She whispered to me that her daughter wouldn’t read out loud to anyone except her, not even to her teacher, her father or her friends. The mom said that she had now read out loud to me and how fantastic that was. I said that she hadn’t read to me: she had read to my dog KoKo!
Putting It All Together

Practice, Practice, Practice!

Before you taking your “reading show” on the road, you might find it helpful to practice some of the skills that your animal will need, such as sitting, standing or lying down quietly next to a child while he or she reads, and staying calm if the child moves around. Remember to keep the training sessions short and fun for your animal, because you want it to associate these activities with positive feelings.

1. Try reading out loud to your animal for 5 minutes while it’s in the position that you think it would be the most comfortable with: on a blanket, sitting in a chair (for a taller animal), at a table (for some smaller species) and so on. Regardless of your animal’s position, make sure that it can still see the pictures in the book!

2. Try reading out loud to your animal in several different areas of your home in 5-minute sessions. Practice turning the pages to desensitize your animal to the sound that they make. Make a point of practicing PETS™ and keeping your voice steady and calm to help your animal relax.

3. After your animal remains relaxed and settled when you read to it for 5 minutes, try increasing the time to 10 minutes. Once again, practice in several different areas of your home. Consider how you’ll keep your animal close enough that you can use touch as a form of praise, reassurance or encouragement.

4. Invite an adult family member or friend over to role-play being a young reader with your animal. Incorporate and practice the three parts of a visit: the approach, the interaction and closure.

5. Arrange to have a child read with your animal for 10 minutes. If possible, have your animal practice reading with several different children, one at a time, during this practice phase, and try increasing the time to 15 minutes. You should also continue practicing PETS™, and incorporating and practicing the three parts of a visit.

If your animal enjoys the practice reading sessions, and you feel comfortable setting up a reading experience and know what to say, you’re both ready to start Read with Me™ visits!
Supply Suggestions

The following are some common items that Read with Me™ teams use, depending on the venue that they visit in:

► A reading blanket that can easily fit you, your animal and a child. A nice size is about 62 by 70 inches, so that there’s a lot of “wiggle” room. Primary colors and fun patterns look inviting to children.

► A sampling of books that are age-appropriate and at a variety of easy reading levels. It’s also fun to have one or two books that have a story about your animal’s species. Some handlers find a book that has a picture that resembles their animal on the cover, or they create their animal’s own personalized book by using digital photos of the animal.

► Hand sanitizer.

► A towel for wiping off wet feet or cleaning up spilled water.

► Treats for your animal, if desired, and a plastic spoon or bowl that children can use to offer treats to it.

► Tissues.

► A small notebook and pen to write down reminders, ideas for the next session, memorable moments and so on.

► Waste bags for cleaning up after your animal.

► A water container for your animal to drink from.

► Personalized tokens of no monetary value that have photos of your animal, such as bookmarks or trading cards (available at www.petpartners.org).
Checklist for Setting up a Read With Me™ Program

**Logistics**

- Research the website of the venue or organization that you’re interested in. If it’s a school district, you might want your first contact to be with a school’s reading specialist, so that he or she can help you figure out who you need to contact next. If you’re contacting a library, you might ask to speak with the children’s librarian.

- Set up a meeting with the interested staff person. For this meeting, leave your animal at home, because the program is still pending. It might be helpful to emphasize the research that supports the positive outcomes from a therapy animal reading program. In addition, stress that therapy animal volunteers are insured and volunteer their time, so there won’t be any costs involved for the facility.

- Establish the staff person who will be in charge, and also the back-up person in case he or she is out of the building. A staff person should be in view of the reading teams at all times.

- Discuss details such as when the program will take place, what space will be used, what books will be available, what age or ages will be reading, and who’s responsible for setting up and sitting at the check-in table, if one is used.

- Establish the designated room for the reading program, and determine the easiest or preferred route to get there when you have your animal with you.

- Have a discussion with the reading program supervisor about the procedure in the event of an emergency or a fire drill, and establish where you should go and what you should do. In a school setting, determine when the passing times are, so that your animal won’t be in the hallway during that time. Otherwise, your animal might be overwhelmed, or its presence might cause students to be late for class.

- Identify an animal-friendly break room that you and your animal can go into if the hallways are too crowded or your animal needs a short respite.

- Establish where your animal may go to relieve itself, and where you should dispose of any waste.
Selection Process

- If you’ll be visiting in a school, discuss the process that will be used to select appropriate students for an ongoing reading program. The discussion should include screening for allergies, photo releases (if needed) and written permission from the parents/guardians to participate in the program.

- For safety reasons, the children who are selected for a reading program shouldn’t have significant behavior issues. The focus should be on helping children improving their reading skills, although there are often other side benefits too. Children who read to an animal might become more confident, improve their attendance, have a more positive attitude toward reading, have increased empathy for others and increased self-esteem, and also improve specific reading skills!

Communication

- Invite the supervisor to write up a brief announcement to notify staff, parents and volunteers that a Read With Me™ program will be starting. Suggest posting signs with your animal’s photo in the main office and in the designated room for the program, so that people will know where they’re taking place. There might be visitors, staff members or children who have allergies or other concerns about animals being in the building. These people deserve the courtesy of an announcement.
Checklist for Presenting in a Classroom

One-on-one reading isn’t the only option that you have as a Pet Partners Read With Me™ team. Consider making presentations to students in their classroom. Your presentation might include details about your animal’s species or breed, and also information animal welfare and responsible pet ownership. The suggestions in the following checklist can help you get started with a classroom presentation.

► Set up the time and date with the teacher who’s supervising the classroom that you’ll be presenting to. Coordinate your arrival with this teacher ahead of time. When you enter with your animal, the children should already be sitting quietly in the area where you’ll give the presentation or conduct the reading session. It might be helpful to have the lights turned down halfway, because this can help settle both animals and children. Ask the teacher to sit up front, so that he or she can intervene with a child if needed. The teacher should be present during the entire presentation or reading session.

► Let the children know the safety rules for petting your animal, and let them line up to pet it one at a time. If it’s not feasible to let everyone pet your animal, consider passing something around to the children, such as a clipping of your horse’s mane, a feather from your parrot, the pack that your llama wears or even photos of your animal on a visit. Anything that the children can touch and that can be safely passed around will help fulfill their need for contact and help form a connection.

► A presentation in a classroom should always teach some elements of animal safety, animal welfare and animal fun! Because your hands need to be free to handle your animal and practice PETS™, invite the teacher or a staff person to read the story during your visit. For a fun closing activity, select a book that’s related to your animal’s species. Encourage the children to read at home by suggesting that they check out books about their own pets or animals that they’re interested in, so that they can learn more about them. They might also enjoy reading a story to their favorite stuffed animal. If a local library or bookstore has a program for reading with animals, create a simple bookmark that lists the upcoming events there.
Snapshot of a Read With Me™ Session

Sometimes, envisioning a new type of visit from start to finish will help you put all the pieces together and realize that, with a few guidelines from the Read With Me™ program in place, it’s fun, rewarding and easy to do! Read the following story of Sandy’s first Read With Me™ visit to help you imagine what your first visit might be like.

**Sandy’s First “Read With Me™” Visit!**

Sandy was really excited to have children read to Dixie, her little terrier cross, for the first time. She had her supply bag all packed and arrived at the local library 30 minutes early to set up her reading blanket.

Dixie was obviously excited too, because her little terrier tail was going 90 miles an hour as they walked into the library. Sandy walked Dixie around the empty room, letting her sniff and check things out before the other two Read With Me™ teams arrived. After the other teams had arrived and were settled in, Sandy practiced PETS™ to calm down her excited little dog. Dixie was soon relaxed and waiting for her first reader to arrive.

Lameesha, one of the high school volunteers at the library, introduced herself and then went to sit at the registration table, where she’d schedule students and offer them hand sanitizer before and after they read with an animal. She’d also escort them over to the team that they’d be reading with that day.

Inviting-looking books that had stories about the species that were represented that day lined the registration table, for children to look at while they waited. Lameesha also encouraged the children to select a book from the table to bring in and read to “their” animal.

Lameesha came over to Dixie and Sandy with their first reader, a 7-year-old boy named Jose, who was wearing a bright-colored soccer shirt.

“Hi,” said Sandy. “This is Dixie, and she’d love it if you’d pet her like this. Want to try?”

The boy said, “Hi, Dixie. I’m Jose.” He smiled at the little dog and scratched her under the chin as he had been shown.

“Dixie is so excited to read today,” Sandy said. “It’s her first time here, and she’s a little nervous. Can you let her know that it will be OK?”

Jose bent down and talked to Dixie while continuing to pet her. “I was nervous for my soccer game today too,” he said. “But we won, so no need to worry: reading will be fun.”
“Do you have a pet at home Jose?” Sandy asked.
“I have a goldfish named Cheetos,” he replied, with a big grin on his face, “but you can’t pet him.”
“Do you have a story about fish to read today?” asked Sandy.
“No,” replied Jose, “but I have this one about a big red dog.”
“Dixie loves the Clifford books!” said Sandy. “Let’s get started reading. Make sure that Dixie can see the pictures.”

Jose then read the story to Dixie, the two of them immersed in the adventure together. Although he shifted positions, sometimes lying on his stomach, he always made sure that the little dog could see the pictures in the story. Sandy slowly rubbed Dixie’s chest once in a while to let her know that she was doing a good job.

Eventually, Lameesha walked quietly past them, holding up two fingers to indicate that there were only 2 minutes left in this reading session. Sandy said, “Dixie is disappointed, Jose, but our reading time has come to an end. But she’d like to give you this bookmark that has her picture on it and a list of her favorite books to read. We haven’t quite finished this story, so would you like to check it out and bring it home to read to Cheetos?”

Grinning, Jose replied, “OK, sounds good!”

Finally, Sandy closed the session by saying, “Dixie wants to thank you for reading with her today and would love to have you pet her one more time before you leave. We’ll be here later this month, so be sure to have your parents check the library calendar.”

“OK! Thanks, and bye Dixie!” Jose called out as he went to meet up with his parents, who were waiting outside of the room.

After the last child for that day had left, Sandy and Dixie packed up. They thanked the librarian and Lameesha, and say goodbye to the other therapy animal teams. At home, Dixie enjoys a rigorous game of fetch while Sandy smiles, thinking about how rewarding and fun their first Read with Me™ experience had been. Both she and Dixie were looking forward to the next time!
Appendix
Species-Specific Considerations

Dogs

Dogs prefer to be in a space where they don’t feel closed in or trapped in a corner. Keep that in mind as you set up the reading area.

Optional Cues That Might Enhance Read With Me™ Visits

► Teach your dog the command to “settle” instead of using “stay.” The implication of the “stay” command is that the dog can’t move until its handler releases it. Having your dog remain in a “stay” for a 15-minute reading session is a lot to ask of it.

► Train your dog to turn toward the book when you say, “Look,” so that the child thinks that it’s truly looking at the pictures and following along with the story.

► Train your dog to fetch and carry a lightweight bag of books, so that it can bring books to the child that will be reading.

► Train your dog to “take a bow” to help close a reading session. It’s a quiet trick and easy to teach through target training (see the “Training Tips” section later in this appendix).

► Train your dog to roll on its back when you say, “Relax.”

► Train your dog to move its head up and down on cue for “yes,” and from side to side for “no.” Children will enjoy asking the dog questions about the story and having it answer them.

► Train your dog to read cards that have words on them!

Cats

Cat allergies are more common than dog allergies. Make sure that the facility where you’re visiting has some pre-screening for readers, and that you’re conscientious about keeping your cat in a specific area to minimize the potential allergens.

Before you leave for your visit, offer your cat an opportunity to use the litter box. In addition, keep the same type of litter box and litter in your vehicle, in case of emergencies.
Equines

Equines are very smart and can be trained to follow some commands or cues that are useful in a reading setting, such as shaking their head in response to “yes”/“no” questions and looking at a book when they’re asked to.

A good position for reading with a miniature equine is to have the child sit in a chair while the equine stands facing the same way. When children sit in a chair, they shift around less, and there’s less likelihood that they’ll accidentally get stepped on. You should be next to your animal’s head and neck and in close proximity. If an equine is lying down, it might become startled and flail its legs as it tries to get up quickly, and this could cause injury to people who are nearby.

During your pre-visit to a facility, determine whether slippery flooring is present where your Read With Me™ sessions will take place. If so, consider bringing a large outdoor rug for your equine to stand on. (You can also use this rug for your equine to stand on when it comes out of its trailer. This will help keep its hooves clean, because it will be standing on the rug, not in dirt.)

Alternatively, many equines do well wearing something over their hooves. There’s a variety of products that your equine can be acclimated to wearing, so that it doesn’t slip on floors. Example include Build-A-Bear boots, Davis boots, vet wrap and Skidders socks. These can also be used to keep your equine’s feet clean until you reach your destination.

Note that, although these non-slip shoes don’t require a special equipment accommodation from Pet Partners, your animal must wear them during your team evaluation if it will wear them during visits.

Rabbits

Most readers that you interact with will have limited experience with rabbits. For your animal’s welfare, take time to orient new friends to some of the unique things about rabbits, such as the importance of approaching from the side because of their blind spot. In addition, be sure to show them how to pet a rabbit, such as by stroking its ears.

As a best practice, you shouldn’t let your rabbit hop around on the floor during a reading session, especially if dogs and/or cats are present. Consider using a basket or soft bed for your rabbit during visits, and don’t let it jump in and out at will. Instead, train your rabbit to know that the only way in or out is when you lift it. This helps it understand that it needs to settle while it’s in the basket.
Guinea Pigs and Rats

These small animals can be wonderful as part of a Read With Me™ team, but before you start, you’ll need to do some extra preparation to set them up for success.

The noise of turning pages in a book can be new and startling to a guinea pig or rat. Therefore, practice turning the pages of a variety of books (some books make more noise than others) at home. As you turn the pages, treat your animal until it no longer startles.

It can be a challenge to keep your rodent facing the book throughout a reading session. To avoid having to physically reposition your animal over and over, consider using a basket or bed that you can reorient instead.

If it’s better to read at a table, while you and the child sit in chairs, make sure that your rodent’s basket/bed is far from the edge, and hold the leash firmly so that your rodent doesn’t accidentally move off the edge. Guinea pigs in particular have no depth perception and would be seriously injured if they fell.

Guinea pigs should never be walked on the floor like a dog, by using a harness and leash. They don’t have bendable backs like other rodents and can easily become injured.

Birds

Birds make a wonderfully unique Read With Me™ animal and are uniquely suited for reading, because they’ll look at illustrations in the book and often enjoy the rhythm of reading aloud. Feathers that your bird has shed itself can make a free and fun bookmark or memento of a visit.

For children who are hesitant, or who might have difficulty using the correct level of pressure when they pet, consider bringing a molted feather from your bird, and have the reader use that to pet the bird. This is still a nice way for the child and animal to connect, and is enjoyable for the bird, but it reduces concerns about appropriate petting.

Depending on the breed and the individual, birds often have an attention span of up to 15 minutes. Keep your bird’s welfare in mind when you select a place to participate in Read With Me™ sessions. Locations that are close to home cut down on travel time, and shorter reading sessions might be what your bird needs in order to be successful.

Birds need something solid to stand or perch on. A portable perch that sits on a table can be used, but be sure to clean it between visits. Some birds can also successfully sit on the back of a chair. The bird can also perch on your hand or
arm. This gives you the most control over your bird during a visit and lets you protect it most effectively. Older children might be able to have your bird sit on their arm. However, be aware that the bird might startle or fall if the child moves unexpectedly. Birds shouldn’t sit on any reader’s shoulder. Otherwise, if your bird becomes frightened, it might unintentionally hurt the child.

Some birds might also be willing to sit on a reader’s lap, but most birds won’t enjoy being on the floor, because that’s where predators hunt them in the wild. Every bird is unique and will have its own preferences about where it would like to perch during a reading session.

As your animal’s best advocate, you might want to experiment with different positions at home before you start your Read With Me™ sessions.

If you decide to bring treats for children to feed to your bird, remember that it can be messy, depending on the type of treat. In addition, given the prevalence of nut allergies among children, it’s best not to bring any kind of nuts as bird treats.

Many birds enjoy doing tricks, but be sure to choose activities that are appropriate for with a quiet environment. For example, vocalization tricks might not be right for this setting. Depending on the bird, some possible tricks might include waving, spinning, and bobbing the head up and down for “yes.”

**Llamas and Alpacas**

Imagine a child’s excitement at being able to read to a camelid, such as a llama or alpaca! However, for these larger therapy animals, the safety of both the animal and the client is always top priority during visits. Don’t allow children to crawl under your llama/alpaca or touch its legs or rear. Not only are such behaviors unsafe, but it’s also unfair to ask your animal to tolerate them.

Before your first Read With Me™ visit, be proactive, and make a pre-visit to the facility. A pre-visit gives you an opportunity to assess the challenges that you and your animal might face, and to plan your route to the location where the reading sessions will take place. For example, surfaces that are heavily polished or wet might be slippery and can difficult for a llama/alpaca to walk on if it hasn’t been desensitized to them first. Therefore, you should find an alternate route if needed. Llamas and alpacas might also be concerned about having large, noisy crowds move toward them. If crowds might be an issue, ask in advance whether a staff member can be responsible for staying with you and redirecting crowds as needed.
Your llama/alpaca can either kush (lie down) or stand while you’re reading with a child. If it will kush, try to find a space that’s carpeted or that has a rug that doesn’t slide. While reading to a kushed llama/alpaca, the child should be either in front of the animal or right next to the side of its head. These are safer positions for the child in the event that the llama/alpaca stands up unexpectedly. If the llama/alpaca is lying down, you might want to hold its lead firmly downward when someone approaches, to remind it to stay down.

The Pet Partners animal vest has pockets that can hold small books. This means that you can have your llama/alpaca carry an assortment of books over to the reader to choose from. What fun for a child to pull one of the books in Anna Dewdney's *Llama, Llama* series out to read!

**Pigs**

As with other hooved animals, slippery floors can be a concern to pigs. Take the time to acclimate your pig to walking on these surfaces, or find an alternate route through the facility as needed. Skid-free outdoor rugs are a good way to define the reading space on a slippery floor. However, a typical reading blanket works fine on carpet.

Because a pig has smaller hooves than equines or camelids, watch for gaps in the flooring, such as you might encounter when you enter or exit an elevator. You can always spread a small solid rug across the gap so that your pig doesn’t get its feet caught.

During reading sessions, the best position for a pig is either standing or lying down (whichever it prefers) between you and the child. This arrangement will make it easier for you to handle your animal. Use treats only if you’re absolutely confident that food aggression won’t be an issue.
Training Tips

The most successful therapy animal teams keep practicing and honing their skills throughout their registration, in the same way that a professional athlete works out, even during the off-season. Consider taking an occasional obedience class, periodically practicing current cues in new settings or adding a new cue to your repertoire to keep your skills sharp.

Desensitizing Your Animal to New Sounds

To desensitize your animal to some of the noises that it might hear during a reading visit, you can download sounds onto a laptop computer or other electronic device, and then play one sound at a time in a room far away from your animal. Remember that animals have much better hearing than humans, so less is more at first! While the sound is playing in another room, give your animal a treat or a toy, or praise or pet. Have your animal listen to the sounds in different locations, gradually moving the source of the sounds closer but continuing to pair them with a positive experience each time that your animal hears them.

Target Training

Target training is a technique where an animal focuses on (“targets”) some object and then moves toward it when prompted. Some trainers use a stick or a wand as the target. In therapy work, handlers most commonly use their own hand or several fingers. When the handler puts his or her hand or fingers out, the animal will follow them on command. Targeting is an effective way to positively reposition an animal to move in a certain direction. During a reading visit, it can come in handy if your animal needs to move forward on the reading blanket to see the book. Or, if there’s a distraction in the room, having your animal target or move to touch your hand can keep it focused and settled. For more information about target training, go to www.clickertraining.com.

Building the Bond

If you’re considering training to add some new cues for future Read With Me™ visits, remember how critical the human-animal bond is to achieving those goals. This is true, no matter how large or small your animal is.
In some ways, handlers of medium-size animals, such as dogs, cats and pot-bellied pigs have the easiest job. In general, these animals live in the house and therefore have ample opportunity for interaction with the people that they live with. Because they generally roam freely in the house, these animals always seem to be right in the middle of all the action in a home, greeting people who stop by, lying underfoot and so on. Nevertheless, as a handler, you still have to devote time and energy to building your relationship with your animal. Don’t rely on casual or accidental interactions.

By contrast, smaller animals, such as birds, rabbits, guinea pigs and rats, are usually contained in a specific room or in a caged area. Therefore, most of them can’t seek out human interaction for themselves. As a handler, you need to spend as much time as possible with your small animal. Because many smaller animals are prey species, developing the animal’s trust in you must be the priority during training sessions. The stronger bond that you develop with your small animal, the less stressed it will be during visits. In addition, by working on desensitizing your animal to different stimuli, the harness and leash, and traveling in a crate, you can help make sure that it will stay calm during visits.

Some ways to deepen a relationship with a smaller animal include teaching it tricks, grooming it daily, or learning how to do massage or TTouch®. (TTouch® is a positive method for influencing an animal’s behavior. For more information, go to www.ttouch.com.) For example, some handlers teach their rabbit to do agility, their bird to sing a song or their rat to go through a fun maze. An enriched environment and a lot of positive contact with their handler help smaller prey animals develop a deep sense of trust.

Finally, larger hoofed animals, such as miniatures horses, llamas and alpacas, live outdoors. Therefore, like small animals, they can’t usually seek out human interaction for themselves. As the handler, you need to make an effort to spend quality time with the animal, so that you can deepen your relationship and your trust in each other. There are many activities that you can do with a miniature horse, llama or alpaca, using a variety of positive training techniques that will deepen the bond between yourself and your animal.

**Body Language**

Like people, most animals use body language as one important means of communicating with each other. However, this doesn’t mean that animals and humans use body language in the same way, or that their signs mean the same things. Therefore, effective cross-species communication can sometimes be challenging.
For example, have you ever said, “I don’t know why my animal just did that, because they have never done it before”? This is a typical comment that handlers make, especially when they’re away from home with their animal.

If your animal’s behavior has ever surprised you during training or while you’re on a visit, chances are that it had previously displayed clear body language that indicated stress or anxiety, but you didn’t recognize the signals.

Proficient and proactive handler can identify when their animal is stressed, and take action to meet its needs. Therefore, commit some time and energy to strengthening your knowledge of the body language and stress responses that are typical for your animal’s species. For example, you can take the *Canine Body Language* course from Pet Partners, do online research or independent reading, or connect with experts, your veterinarian, other Pet Partners handlers or Pet Partners team evaluators.
Suggested Book Titles

Dogs
► Art Dog by Thacher Hurd
► Biscuit by Alyssa Satin Capucilli
► Clifford series by Norman Bridwell
► Dog Loves Books by Louise Yates
► Dogs by Emily Gravett
► Go, Dog, Go! by P.D. Eastman
► Henry and Mudge series by Cynthia Rylant
► Hooray for Reading Day! by Margery Cuyler
► Love Comes on a Leash by Jody Schwallier-Otwell
► Martha Speaks series by Susan Meddaugh
► Moose! The Reading Dog by Laura Bruneau and Beverly Timmons
► No Time for That Now by Jeannine Heil
► Shampoodle by Joan Holub
► Tiny Goes to the Library by Cari Meister

Cats
► Cat by Mike Dumbleton
► Garfield series by Jim Davis
► Kat Kong by Dav Pilkey
► The Cat in the Hat series by Dr. Seuss
► I Love Cats by Barney Saltzberg
► Pete the Cat series by James Dean
► Widget by Lyn Rossiter McFarland

Rabbits
► A Boy and His Bunny by Sean Bryan
► Bunnicula series by James Howe
► Bunny Loves to Read by Peter Bently
► Howard B. Wigglebottom series by Howard Binkow
► It’s Not Easy Being a Bunny by Marilyn Sadler
► Nobunny’s Perfect by Anna Dewdney
► P.J. Funnybunny series by Marilyn Sadler
► While We Were Out by Ho Baek Lee
► Why Do Rabbits Hop? by Joan Holub
Birds
- More by I.C. Springman
- Parrots by Henri Galeron
- The Umbrella by Jan Brett
- The Parrot Tico Tango by Anna Witte
- Good Morning to Me! by Lita Judge
- Cockatoos by Quentin Blake
- Cockatoo, Too by Bethanie Deeney Murguia
- Flap Your Wings by P.D. Eastman
- Fine Feathered Friends by Tish Rabe
- If You Were a Parrot by Katherine Rawson

Guinea Pigs
- Brian & Bob: The Tale of Two Guinea Pigs by Georgie Ripper
- Fluffy series by Kate McMullen
- Guinea Pigs Don’t Read Books by Colleen Stanley Bare
- One Guinea Pig Is Not Enough by Kate Duke
- Pig Enough by Janie Bynum
- Super Guinea Pig to the Rescue by Udo Weigelt
- What Would a Guinea Pig Do? by Kate Duke

Pigs
- The Adventures of Isabelle the Lost Pot Belly Pig by Gail Gorski-Sterner
- Potbellied Pigs: Cool Pets! by Alvin Silverstein and Virginia Silverstein
- Puck and the Pot Bellied Pigs by Mary Kelly
- Tiny Teacup and Pot Belly Pig by Wanda Fay Messimer

Alpacas and Llamas
- The Alpaca-bet! by Kathryn Keil Brown
- An Alpaca in my Pocket by Mindy J.B. Whitten
- Is Your Mama a Llama? by Deborah Guarino
- The Littlest Llama by Jane Buxton
- Llama, Llama series by Anna Dewdney
- Maria Had a Little Llama by Angela Domínguez
- Why Do Llamas Wear Pajamas? by Sally Huss
- Al the Alpaca: Forever Friend by Diane Odegard Gockel
Equines

- *A Friend for Einstein: The Smallest Stallion* by Charlie Cantrell and Dr. Rachel Wagner
- *Itty & Bitty: Two Miniature Horses* by Nancy Carpenter Czerw
- *Itty & Bitty: On the Road* by Nancy Carpenter Czerw
- *Little Big Horse* by Dave Horowitz
- *Miniature Horses: Cool Pets!* by Alvin Silverstein and Virginia Silverstein
- *Teeny Tiny Ernest* miniature donkey series by Laura T. Barnes
- *The Horse in Harry’s Room* by Syd Hoff
- *Thumbelina: The World’s Smallest Horse* by Random House

Rats

- *The Cat, the Rat, and the Baseball Bat* by Andy Griffiths
- *I Brought My Rat for Show-and-Tell* by Joan Horton
- *Pie Rats Ahoy!* by Richard Scarry

Looking for Other Book Titles?

The children’s librarian at your local library or an employee in the children’s section of a bookstore can be a great resource for finding more books that are age-appropriate, and that suit you and your animal. You can also find suggestions online, at websites such as these:

- **RedRover.org**: This site has a booklist that focuses on the human-animal bond for multiple species, and books that deal with kindness to animals and responsible pet ownership.
  https://redrover.org/recommended-childrens-books-humane-themes
- **LibraryBookLists.org**: This site lists fiction books for children for a variety of species and includes a short description of each book.
  http://www.librarybooklists.org/fiction/children/janimals.htm
- **LibraryDogs.com**: Focusing on dogs only, this site has lists of books arranged by breed.
  http://www.librarydogs.com/books_with_your_breed.html