



A world in which Autism is celebrated.

Registered Charity No. 1152188

Health and Safety

20a Therapy Dog Policy

Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. Sunbeams has introduced the use of a therapy dog to support the emotional well-being provision. This policy is designed to set out to the children and young people, parents, carers, staff and visitors the reasons for having a therapy dog at Sunbeams and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of our children and young people, staff and visitors attending along with the therapy dogs wellbeing.

Although there are risks bringing a dog into Sunbeams, this can be mitigated against with a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all children and young people, staff and visitors.

The benefits of a therapy dog - Therapy dogs have been proven to help develop children and young people's reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and confidence, as well as increasing understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills. At Sunbeams we hope that our dog will be a beneficial addition to the therapeutic offer, acting as an addition to the interventions already offered and promoting engagement for children and young people who may have found it difficult to access talking therapies in the past.

Animal assisted therapy can:

- Teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills
- Help individuals develop social skills
- Be soothing and support the development of rapport between the professional and client, and improve individual's skills to pick up social cues imperative to human relationships
- Professionals can process that information and use it to help clients see how their behaviour affects others
- Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system - A recent report highlighted children working with therapy dogs experienced increased motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes
- Gains in confidence
- Decreases in anxiety behaviours resulting in improved learning outcomes, such as increases in reading and writing levels
- Positive changes towards learning and improved motivation, and
- Enhanced relationships with peers and playworkers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive regard from a therapy dog. This in turn helps learning on how to express feelings and enter into more trusting relationships.

- Confidence benefits “If children are partnered with a dog to read to, for example, the dog provides comfort, encourages positive social behaviour, enhances self-esteem, motivates speech and inspires children to have fun and enjoy the non-judgmental experience” Bark & Read – The Kennel Club (<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread/>).
- SEN benefits “Therapy Dogs Nationwide dogs have also shown to help with special needs and autistic children and adults by giving focus and providing a calming environment.” Therapy Dogs Nationwide (<http://www.tdn.org.uk/schools/>)
- Mental Health Benefits “There is emerging evidence to suggest that Animal Assisted Psychotherapy improves the efficacy of mental health treatments in self-selected adolescent populations via reductions in primary symptomatology, and via secondary factors that improve therapeutic processes and quality, such as engagement and retention”. Incorporating animal-assisted therapy in mental health treatments for adolescents: A systematic review of canine assisted psychotherapy Melanie G. Jones, Simon M. Rice, Susan M. Cotton. 2019; 14(1), 2019.
- Behaviour benefits “Researchers report that children can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how peers may feel.

The Manager, (Sue Carr) and the Trustees have agreed to the presence of a therapy dog at Sunbeams.

The Sue Carr is the legal owner of the dog, a black Labrador named Raven who has been selected for his temperament and has full responsibility for his welfare and will pay all expenses relating to general pet insurance, vaccinations, flea and worm treatment, food and maintenance costs.

Raven is the only dog allowed on the premises. No other dogs are permitted unless the Manager has agreed their visit.

A risk assessment has been carried out and approved by the Trustees and this will be reviewed annually.

Raven will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Sue Carr or other trained staff members.

Insurance

Raven is covered by Sunbeam’s Public Liability Insurance policy and the Manager has responsibility for ensuring this remains on the Sunbeam’s policy while he remains as a therapy dog at Sunbeams.

Raven is also fully insured by the Sue Carr with additional public liability insurance being paid by Sunbeams.

Presence

Staff, parents and children and young people will be informed in writing that a dog will be at Sunbeams.

The presence of our therapy dog will made clear to visitors upon their arrival at the Sunbeams.

The Sue Carr will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.

If the dog is ill he will not be allowed into Sunbeams. Sue Carr has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care for the dog if he is not able to be in the Sunbeams on a given day.

Sue Carr is responsible for ensuring the training and accreditation of the dog.

The therapy dog will be kept in the Manager's or Deputy's office when Sue is not available.

Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the therapy dog. Attendees whose parents have withdrawn consent will not be able to attend dog therapy sessions.

Children and young people must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

Children and young people will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog before any interaction during a therapy session or visit.

If the dog is surrounded by a large number of children, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation. If the dog is displaying any warning signs such as growling or flattening of his ears, he should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling him.

Raven will be taken for toilet breaks away from the centre but any accidental fouling should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately, sanitizing the area.

Legal framework

- Equality Act 2010
- Animal Welfare Act 2006 (the 2006 Act)

This policy was adopted on

20th November 2021

Policy updated

July 2025

Date to be reviewed

April 2026

Signed on behalf of the management committee

Name of Signatory Susan Carr

Role of Signatory Manager

Reviewed By	Date
Sue Carr	24/04/2024
Sue Carr	12/07/2025