



READING EDUCATION  
ASSISTANCE DOGS™

A PROGRAM OF  
INTERMOUNTAIN THERAPY ANIMALS

## R.E.A.D.®—The Essential Prerequisites

Is the R.E.A.D. Program for you and your dog? If you're already a registered therapy team, here's a profile of what a good R.E.A.D. team looks like, so you can consider whether this might be a good fit for you and your therapy companion.

### A. Qualities of a Good R.E.A.D. Therapy Animal

Reading is the perfect therapy job for a dog who loves to lie around and snuggle, who is calm and peaceful, who loves to be touched and stroked. It could also be appropriate for therapy animals who are beginning to slow down—a nice transition to a less active environment—provided the noisier elements are not too stressful for them.

- Calm, quiet, attentive, and comfortable in low-key setting; conversely, able to deal with close and unexpected encounters with large groups of rambunctious children.
- Solid obedience skills; ability/willingness to learn things like the paw-stay and focused attention
- Tolerant of chaotic environments and sudden loud noises (school bells, surprises, puppets in the face, and costumes are just a few of the things our teams have encountered).
- Tolerant of tugging, pulling and exuberant handling.
- Neutral to presence of toys, crayons, paper, books, and lunch remnants in trash baskets.
- What about other animals? The name of the program notwithstanding, a few special cats have already demonstrated that felines can be R.E.A.D. animals, too. We even have an African Grey Parrot who has recently started the program.

### B. Qualities of a Good R.E.A.D. Human Teammate

- Qualities similar to those of the therapy animal with the basic requisite of enjoying children.
- Need to love to read! And be competent reader! Willing to discover children's books.
- Willingness to get to know the children, understand their challenges, remember things about them.
- Compassion for and sensitivity to the



hesitant and reticent child; patience with the over-active child.

- Patience with repetitive reading of the same books and the ability to discern age-appropriate reading material or related activities (letters or picture books for toddlers).
- Flexibility and the ability to “go with the flow.”
- Willingness to teach your dog a few new commands.



- Comfortable extending yourself somewhat beyond being “just” your animal’s advocate—a R.E.A.D. handler participates more directly with clients since a therapist is not there to direct the session.

### C. Commitment Required!

- Team must be very serious about commitment to the program. Typical time commitments:

*Length:*

- Schools – after school programs with a reading specialist (2:45-4:00 PM).
- Library programs – most library programs run on Saturdays. Typical session runs 1-½ to 2 hours.

*Duration:*

- School programs will generally require a once-a-week session for at least half the school year and ideally the entire school year. Some schools are now year-round, so you’ll probably be taking the same breaks as the kids in those cases.
- Commitment to grooming – This is essential not only to make your animal a desirable reading companion, but often also to be a role model. Many of the children you will be reading with are disadvantaged in lots of ways and don’t always have good role models at home. The animals provide a great way to model appropriate habits for the children. (“Before Maggie came to see you today, she was brushed and groomed and had her teeth brushed, as well. Did you brush your teeth before our visit?”) Does “doggie breath” linger on her every doggie kiss? Are you, as the human component of the team, also neat, well-groomed and presentable?

