



### Therapy Dog-Assisted Exercise for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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### Therapy Dogs, Not Service Dogs!

- Service dogs perform specific tasks for a single individual with a disability:
  - ◆ Guide dogs, hearing dogs, seizure-alert dogs, hypoglycemia-alert dogs, dogs for emotional support
- Therapy dogs, with a handler, visit individuals or groups to provide some relief from an institution (e.g., a hospital) or a condition (e.g., ASD).
- Animal-assisted therapy vs. animal-assisted activities


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### Training of Therapy Dogs

- Service dogs – obedience and customized training to meet owner’s needs
- Therapy dogs – obedience training and appropriate behavior for making visits:
  - ◆ Accepting a friendly stranger
  - ◆ Sitting politely for petting and loose leash walking
  - ◆ Reaction to other animals
  - ◆ Acceptance of treats
  - ◆ Walking through a crowd
  - ◆ Reaction to distractions

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### Benefits of Therapy Dogs



- Bring comfort to those with anxiety and fear
- Enhance trust toward the instructor
- Provide unconditional acceptance and empathy
- Supply and provide opportunities for nurture
- Provide connection with nature
- Enhance creativity, sense of play, and joy
- Provide opportunities to model behaviors
- Improve physical health

(Wilkers, 2010)  
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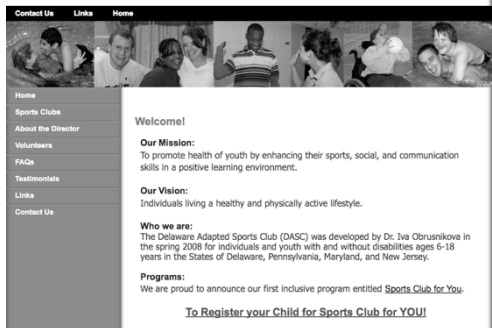



- One-on-one visitations at homes or in hospitals
- Reading programs
- Drug and Alcohol treatment programs
- PT/OT/Speech Therapy
- Early Learning Center Mobility project
- Therapy dog-assisted exercise for children with ASD in the Delaware Adapted Sports Club

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### www.adaptedde.org

#### Delaware Adapted Sports Club



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**Welcome!**

**Our Mission:**  
 To promote health of youth by enhancing their sports, social, and communication skills in a positive learning environment.

**Our Vision:**  
 Individuals living a healthy and physically active lifestyle.

**Who we are:**  
 The Delaware Adapted Sports Club (DASC) was developed by Dr. Iva Obrusnikova in the spring 2008 for individuals and youth with and without disabilities ages 6-18 years in the States of Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey.

**Programs:**  
 We are proud to announce our first inclusive program entitled Sports Club for You.

**To Register your Child for Sports Club for YOU!**

### Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Evident before age of 3 (often diagnosed later)
- Developmental disabilities
- Qualitative impairments in:
  - ◆ Communication
  - ◆ Social interaction
- Presence of unusual behaviors and interests
- Unusual response to sensory experiences
- Unusual way of learning, paying attention

(APA, 2000; CDC, 2007)

### SCY Instructors

- Undergraduate students pursuing a career in OT, PT, Adapted PE, PE, Elementary Ed., Psychology
- All supervised and trained by the program director and her assistants



### Motivators Used in SCY

- Stickers, tokens (footprints, thumbs-up), stamps
- Number of steps measured by a pedometer
- Making a deal in the beginning of class
- Relating activities to their interests (e.g., Star Wars)
- Playing their favorite role or activity after all tasks were completed
- Positive notes or feedback
- Modeling behaviors

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### Stickers, Stamps, & Tokens



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### Therapy Dog Assisted Exercise (TDAE)




*Learning Situations*

1. • Cooperative
2. • Competitive/Parallel
3. • Individualistic


*Cooperative Learning Situations*

- Child and a canine team work together to achieve the same goal.
- Foundation for other activities, enhance a child's social skills, social responsibility, patience, and decrease their anxiety
- Stations:
  - ◆ Running, walking around track
  - ◆ Striking a baseball
  - ◆ Throwing a ball




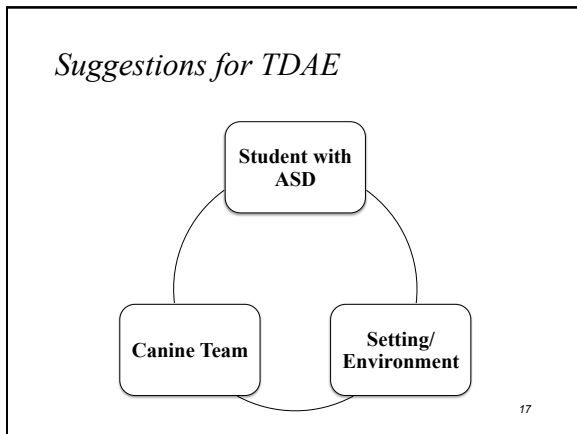
*Competitive/Parallel Learning Situations*

- Child and a canine team work toward individual goals at the same time.
- Motivation to participate in the activity in an emotionally safe environment
- Stations:
  - ◆ Tunnel
  - ◆ Hurdles
  - ◆ Aerobic steps
  - ◆ Running
  - ◆ Stretching




*Individualistic Learning Situations*

- Child works towards her/his own individual goal while the canine team observes and provides feedback.
- When activities would be unsafe or hard to modify for the dog
- Provides emotional support for the child
- Stations:
  - ◆ Jump rope, fitness exercises
  - ◆ Kicking, shooting, dribbling, throwing, passing

*Children with ASD*

- Prior experiences with animals
- Personal interests and age
- Allergies
- Fixation on the therapy dog
- Isolation from peers, social stigma
- Routines between activities



### *Canine Team – Handler*



- Dedication and commitment of the handler
- Handler’s knowledge of the tasks and characteristics of ASD
- Provide them with information about the child’s specific needs, responsibilities, and expectations
- Provide them with a lesson plan
- Age, fitness level, and health of the handler

### *Canine Team – Therapy Dog*

- Choosing a therapy dog to match the child’s personality
- Age, fitness level, and health of the dog
- Safety of the activities for the therapy dog
- Comfortable in the environment

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### *Setting/Environment*

- Permission from the administration for the canine team to enter the facility and walk on the gym floor
- Safe floor for the canine team
- Durable equipment
- Bathroom and water routines
- Temperature & humidity
- Training peers without disabilities



### *Taking Therapy Dogs into Your Program*

- Selecting and contacting a local organization
- Solicit an interest from other teachers
- Approval from the administration
- Permission from parents or legal guardians
- Assessment of the child’s and dog’s abilities
- Introductory session for the team and the child
- Modifications of existing activities

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### *Finding an Organization*

- Delta Society ([www.deltasociety.org](http://www.deltasociety.org))
- ASPCA/Humane Societies
- Local Kennel Clubs
- Local veterinarians
- Pet supply stores

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### *What to Look For in an Organization*

- Require:
  - ◆ Testing and periodic retesting of the dogs
  - ◆ Current shot records (rabies and distemper)
  - ◆ State dog license and ID tag
- Provide:
  - ◆ Insurance
  - ◆ Support to the canine teams
  - ◆ Training for the canine teams

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