CONQUEST CENTRE

Conquest Farm, Norton Fitzwarren
Taunton, Somerset. TA2 6PN
01823 433614
info@conquestcentre.org.uk

Therapy Dog Policy

(For Work with Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults)

6th March 2026 v1

CONQUEST CENTRE

Conquest Farm, Norton Fitzwarren
Taunton, Somerset. TA2 6PN
01823 433614
info@conquestcentre.org.uk

1. Policy Statement

Conquest Centre recognises the positive impact that therapy dogs can have on the wellbeing, emotional regulation, and engagement of children, young people and vulnerable adults. The use of trained therapy dogs can support people experiencing anxiety, trauma, stress, or other emotional challenges.

This policy sets out the procedures and safeguards required to ensure that therapy dogs are used safely, ethically, and in a way that protects the welfare of both the people and the animals involved.

The charity is committed to ensuring that therapy dog activities are:

- Safe for children, young people, vulnerable adults, staff, and volunteers
- Conducted with appropriate safeguarding measures
- Managed in line with UK animal welfare standards
- Inclusive and respectful of allergies, fears, and cultural considerations

---

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Staff and volunteers working with therapy dogs
- External therapy dog handlers engaged by the charity
- Any sessions where a therapy dog is present during work with children, young people under the age of 18 and vulnerable adults

---

3. Definitions

Therapy Dog
A dog that has been assessed and trained to work with people to provide emotional support, comfort, and wellbeing benefits in structured settings.

Handler
The individual responsible for the therapy dog during sessions. This may be a trained volunteer, staff member, or external provider.

People
Children, young people under the age of 18, and vulnerable adults who access services from the charity.

Conquest Farm, Norton Fitzwarren
Taunton, Somerset. TA2 6PN
01823 433614
info@conquestcentre.org.uk

4. Expected Benefits

Therapy dogs may support people by:

- Reducing anxiety and stress
- Supporting emotional regulation
- Encouraging communication and engagement
- Providing comfort during difficult discussions
- Supporting wellbeing and resilience

Therapy dogs **do not replace professional therapeutic or clinical interventions** but may complement existing support work.

---

5. Safeguarding and Consent

5.1 Parental/Guardian Consent

Written consent must be obtained from parents, carers or guardians before a person participates in sessions involving a therapy dog.
Consent forms must include:

- Allergy disclosure
- Cultural or religious considerations
- Consent for interaction with the dog

5.2 Person Choice

People must never be required to interact with a therapy dog. Participation must always be voluntary.

Alternative arrangements must be available for people who:

- Are afraid of dogs
- Have allergies
- Prefer not to participate

5.3 Supervision

A therapy dog must **never be left alone with a child, young person or vulnerable adult**.

The handler must remain present and responsible for the dog at all times.

---

6. Therapy Dog Requirements

Registered Charity No. 1103883 / Registered Company No. 5079915

CONQUEST CENTRE

Conquest Farm, Norton Fitzwarren
Taunton, Somerset. TA2 6PN
01823 433614
info@conquestcentre.org.uk

All therapy dogs used in the charity must meet the following standards:

6.1 Health

Dogs must:

- Be fully vaccinated
- Receive regular flea and worm treatment
- Be regularly checked by a veterinarian
- Be clean and well groomed before sessions

6.2 Temperament

Dogs must demonstrate:

- Calm and predictable behaviour
- Comfort around children, young people and vulnerable adults
- No history of aggression

6.3 Certification

Where possible, therapy dogs should be certified through recognised organisations such as:

- Therapy Dogs Nationwide
- Pets As Therapy (PAT)

Certification records must be kept on file at Conquest Centre.

---

7. Handler Requirements

Handlers must:

- Be trained in therapy dog handling
- Understand safeguarding procedures
- Hold an **enhanced DBS check** if working regularly with children, young people and vulnerable adults
- Be responsible for monitoring the dog's welfare during sessions

Handlers must remove the dog immediately if signs of stress or discomfort are observed.

CONQUEST CENTRE

Conquest Farm, Norton Fitzwarren
Taunton, Somerset. TA2 6PN
01823 433614
info@conquestcentre.org.uk

8. Session Management

8.1 Risk Assessment

A risk assessment must be completed before therapy dog activities take place. This should consider:

- Allergies
- Phobias
- Environment safety
- Hygiene
- Dog behaviour and stress signals

8.2 Hygiene

People must:

- Wash or sanitise hands before and after interacting with the dog
- Avoid feeding the dog unless supervised

The dog must not be allowed in food preparation areas.

8.3 Interaction Guidelines

Young people must be guided on appropriate behaviour including:

- Gentle touching
- No pulling ears or tail
- No sudden movements near the dog

---

9. Dog Welfare

The welfare of the therapy dog is a priority.

Dogs must:

- Have regular breaks
- Access water at all times
- Not be required to work for excessive periods
- Have a safe space to rest

Sessions should typically be limited to **reasonable time periods appropriate for the dog**.

CONQUEST CENTRE

Conquest Farm, Norton Fitzwarren
Taunton, Somerset. TA2 6PN
01823 433614
info@conquestcentre.org.uk

10. Insurance and Liability

The charity must ensure appropriate insurance coverage is in place, including:

- Public liability insurance
- Insurance covering therapy dog activities

External providers must provide proof of their own insurance where applicable.

---

11. Incident Management

Any incidents involving the therapy dog must be recorded and reported, including:

- Bites or scratches
- Allergic reactions
- Behaviour concerns

If a bite occurs:

1. First aid must be provided immediately.
2. Parents/guardians must be informed.
3. An incident report must be completed.
4. The therapy dog must be withdrawn from work pending review.

---

12. Equality and Inclusion

The charity recognises that some individuals may have:

- Cultural or religious concerns about dogs
- Allergies
- Fear or trauma relating to animals

Participation in therapy dog sessions will **always be optional**, and reasonable adjustments will be provided.

---

13. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed:

- Annually, or
- Following any significant incident involving a therapy dog

Responsibility for reviewing this policy rests with the charity's leadership and safeguarding lead.

CONQUEST CENTRE

Conquest Farm, Norton Fitzwarren
Taunton, Somerset. TA2 6PN
01823 433614
info@conquestcentre.org.uk

14. Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Risk Assessment Procedures
- Volunteer Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy