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Grief Therapy Dogs

Dogs can have an amazing effect on people. They can ease anxiety with a simple loving look or by allowing you to touch their head, nape or back. Assisting people with stress reduction is a gift provided by dogs.

Our family has been a long time dog loving one. Many times throughout the years, our dogs have given peace and added harmony to our home and life. With this in mind and after researching the use of dogs with our Veterans that suffer with PTSD, this made me consider the possibility of training a therapy dog to "work" in our funeral home. Our families are definitely suffering from "distress" and could possibly benefit from a little dog love.

I discussed this idea with a family we served that are breeders of Labrador Retrievers. They were intrigued by the idea and enthusiastically discussed the different personalities of each dog; not every dog is meant to work in our environment. They would be available to the families in the visitation parlors or chapel. A staff member would always remain with the dog to ensure their safety. All families have the option to allow our therapy dog to visit with them. Some cultures are not comfortable with the dogs and it is our responsibility to keep them apart from any negative responses.

After making a plan, we waited patiently for a suitable puppy. Once a litter was available, the Breeder watched the personalities of all the puppies and chose a couple of special puppies for us. We visited the farm to meet them all and left with two beautiful chocolate lab puppies, one girl and one boy, to become our funeral home's new four legged employees.

Hope and Peace were soon to be Virginia's first trained Grief Therapy Dogs. We selected a certified trainer, Off Leash K9, in central Virginia. They gave several of us instructions on training the puppies, such as how to feed and give simple commands. They also gave us tips on "desensitizing" the puppies from distractions; while we fed them, we pulled their tails, pinched them (not mean), and showed emotions that they might be exposed to "on the job."

Once they were old enough, both puppies were sent off to "boot camp" for 24/7 training. We were emailed pictures and updates daily. We were all excited on the day they finally came home! They were so little and cute when they would "sit sit" on command.

Hope and Peace are positive additions to our funeral home staff. They break the tension of family situations in the arrangement conference and share their love with everyone around the table. Several families have specifically requested their presence at visitation and service. They don't both work on the same days; their behavior is best when you have their full attention.

In addition, they have a calming effect on the staff. They provide the same love and attention to each of us when situations are not always easy. Even when I am not so pleasant to be around Hope and Peace are always in a good mood!

The dogs are being introduced to the community as well. They accompany the directors to doctor's offices, nursing homes, and hospitals for drop off/pick up of death certificates. It's amazing how much happier and helpful the receptionists and nurses seem to be when they see happy wagging tails and that in turn will get death certificates signed a little quicker! Our future plan is to have them visit families as a part of our Hospice Outreach. The Hospice Workers seem to be receptive; we want to be sure the dogs are ready and continue to train them. Additional interaction at the funeral home will facilitate this in the future.

In conjunction with our Therapy Dog program, we are making a push to be a pet friendly funeral home. If a family makes a request, we will make proper arrangements for a beloved pet to spend time with their "Mom" or "Dad" one last time. Those families that are pet lovers appreciate that we offer this even if they opt not to have a "furry family" visitation.

This service, in addition to all the other unique services that we offer, allows our firm to stand out from the rest and we get to connect with a family in a different way.

"I think dogs are the most amazing creatures; they give unconditional love. For me they are the role model for being alive." – Gilda Radner

Respectfully,

Laurence F. "Larry" Spiaggi, CFSP, CPC, CCO
Owner/Director
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Grief Therapy Dogs



In difficult times we all can appreciate unconditional affection. Hope and Peace, Morrissett Funeral & Cremation Service's trained, on-staff therapy dogs, provide just that with their own special attention that helps family members relax and ease their pain.

Hope and Peace, two AKC Chocolate Labs, are dedicated Therapy Dogs. They enjoy making visits around the community, spreading happiness and warmth to those they meet. Hope and Peace have a special niche at our funeral home where they soothe grieving families with their calming presence. Outside of their duties, Hope and Peace are cheerful family dogs, and love cuddling with our family at home, playfully enjoying our property that we lovingly call "Labrador Acres", and receiving well-deserved treats.



Hope



Peace