

# **U.S. VRC CB ‘Battle Buddy’ Emotional Support Dog Program Standard Operating Procedures**

## **Program Overview**

- **Purpose:** To provide emotional and psychological support to persons in crisis through interactions with certified emotional support dogs.
- **Scope:** Applies to all staff, volunteers, emotional support dog handlers, and participating U.S. VRC members.

## **Eligibility & Enrollment**

### **CB Handler Requirements**

- Must be a current member of the U.S. VRC.
- Complete an intake form including medical clearance if required.
- Participate in an initial interview to assess suitability and goals.
- Must be the handler of the emotional support dog.
- Complete background check and handler training specific to crisis support.
- Maintain liability insurance if required by the program.

### **Emotional support Dogs**

- Must be certified by a recognized emotional support dog organization
- Must be at least 1 year old and pass temperament and obedience evaluations.
- Must be up-to-date on vaccinations and health checks.

## **Health & Safety Protocols**

- Dogs must be groomed, clean, and free of fleas and ticks before each session.
- Handlers must carry vaccination records and emergency contact info.
- Immediate removal of dog from session if signs of distress or illness appear.
- Handlers must disclose allergies or phobias related to dogs during intake.

## **Session Guidelines**

### **Scheduling**

- Sessions are scheduled weekly, biweekly, or monthly based on situational needs.
- Locations include VA hospitals, veteran centers, approved community spaces, disaster or crisis areas.

### **Structure**

- Sessions last 30–60 minutes.
- May include structured activities (e.g., walking, grooming, games) or unstructured companionship.
- Handlers must remain present and attentive throughout.

## **Documentation & Reporting**

- Maintain attendance logs and session notes.
- Report incidents (e.g., bites, injuries, emotional distress) within 24 hours.
- Submit quarterly impact reports including client feedback and progress.
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## **Training & Evaluation**

### **Dogs**

- Annual re-evaluation for certification and temperament.
- Ongoing training in obedience and emotional support-specific skills.

### **Handlers**

- Attend annual refresher courses.

- Participate in peer review and feedback sessions.

### **Code of Conduct**

- Respect client privacy and confidentiality.
- No political, religious, or commercial promotion during sessions.
- Emotional support dogs must be leashed and under control at all times.
- No forced interaction—client consent is required for all activities.

### **Emergency Procedures**

- In case of medical emergency, follow site-specific protocols and call 911.
- Remove dog from scene if disruptive or unsafe.
- Complete incident report and notify program coordinator immediately.