

CRITICAL INCIDENT & TRAUMA RESPONSE SUPPORT K9 PROGRAM (WAGS)

AUTHORITY: Chief Probation Officer

PURPOSE: To establish guidelines for the management, deployment, and oversight of the Orange County Probation Department's Critical Incident and Trauma Response Support K9 Program (WAGS).

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

- A. Support K9: A certified canine trained to provide trauma-informed emotional stabilization. Support K9s are not trained in detection, patrol, or enforcement activities.
- B. Support K9 Handler: A Department employee trained and authorized to deploy and care for a Support K9.
- C. Support K9 Team: A certified Support K9 and assigned handler.
- D. Deployment: Authorized use of a Support K9 for voluntary, non-enforcement emotional support during approved Department activities.
- E. Critical Incident: An event involving trauma exposure, serious injury, death, violence, or emotional distress.
- F. Voluntary Interaction: Engagement with a Support K9 that is optional and may be declined at any time without consequence.
- G. Support K9 teams are classified as non-enforcement canine teams and shall not be used for detection, search, enforcement, or investigative purposes.
- H. Support K9s are specially trained to recognize and respond to indicators of human stress and emotional distress, including scent-based and behavioral cues, to support emotional stabilization and engagement.
- I. Participation in Support K9 interactions is voluntary and shall not be implied as part of compliance with supervision, investigation, or any legal process.
- J. Support K9 deployment shall not occur in a manner that could reasonably be interpreted as part of a law enforcement operation.
- K. Support K9 participation does not alter compensation, overtime eligibility, collective bargaining obligations, or employment status and shall be administered in compliance with applicable labor laws.

II. RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION
 - 1. Oversight structure shall be approved by the Chief Probation Officer or designee.
 - 2. The Support K9 Program should operate under a service-based model.
 - a. Support canines shall only be obtained through approved providers.
 - b. Training and certification shall only be provided through Department-approved training providers.
 - c. Program resources shall be managed in accordance with Department procurement and funding requirements.

3. A Program Coordinator may be assigned to manage day-to-day administration and operations. Responsibilities include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Ensuring compliance with all applicable policies, procedures, and legal requirements.
 - b. Establishing deployment criteria and prioritization.
 - c. Coordinating deployments through the Peer Support framework.
 - d. Monitoring program utilization, safety, and effectiveness.
 - e. Coordinating training and certification requirements.
 - f. Reviewing documentation and ensuring reporting standards are met.
 - g. Conducting periodic program reviews and identifying and implementing needed improvements.
 - h. Addressing compliance concerns related to handler performance, training, or program use.
 - i. Preparing periodic or annual program summaries for executive leadership.

B. DEPLOYMENT

1. Support K9 responses are supportive in nature and shall not be interpreted as an assessment, diagnosis, or determination of an individual's condition or state.
2. Support K9 use is subject to the following limitations:
 - a. Interactions are voluntary and not based on legal authority for search or seizure.
 - b. Shall not be used to influence compliance, cooperation, or investigative outcomes.
 - c. Shall not be used during active enforcement, search, or investigative operations where their presence could be misinterpreted.
3. Support K9 deployment may be authorized for:
 - a. Crisis intervention and critical incidents
 - b. Victim-centered interactions
 - c. Youth stabilization activities
 - d. Staff wellness support following critical incidents
 - e. Approved community education activities
4. All deployments shall:
 - a. Be voluntary for participants
 - b. Be coordinated and authorized through the Support K9 Program; supervisory approval is required for employee release based on operational needs
 - c. Prioritize safety and canine welfare
 - d. Remain consistent with the non-enforcement purpose of the program
5. Handlers shall not independently initiate deployment outside of established program protocols.
6. Handlers may only deploy within their approved training scope.

C. PROHIBITED USE

1. Support K9s shall not be used for:
 - a. Detection or search activities
 - b. Apprehension or enforcement actions
 - c. Evidence gathering or investigative functions
 - d. Disciplinary purposes
 - e. Compliance enforcement
 - f. Participation in active enforcement, search, or investigative operations where the Support K9's presence may be misinterpreted
2. Support K9 interactions shall not influence investigative, disciplinary, or legal outcomes.

D. TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

1. Support K9 handlers shall complete Department-approved training prior to deployment.
2. All Support K9 teams shall maintain certification consistent with recognized crisis response or support canine standards.
3. Training shall focus on emotional stabilization, engagement, and handler coordination.
4. Training includes recognition of stress-related cues and appropriate response behaviors to support de-escalation and engagement. Training does not involve diagnostic or evaluative assessment of individuals.
5. Training shall not include detection, apprehension, or enforcement-related conditioning associated with law enforcement or search activities.

E. HANDLERS

1. Support K9 handlers shall:
 - a. Maintain control and welfare of the assigned canine at all times
 - b. Comply with all Department canine care and housing standards
 - c. Complete and maintain required training and certification
 - d. Ensure deployments are appropriate, authorized, and safe
 - e. Maintain required documentation and reporting
 - f. Immediately report injuries, incidents, or canine welfare concerns
 - g. Not present the Support K9 as an enforcement canine
 - h. Permit inspection of canine housing and equipment as required by Department policy.
2. Primary Handlers are responsible for daily care, conditioning, and maintaining the Support K9 in a continuous state of readiness, including structured daily engagement and reinforcement of trained behaviors, consistent with Department canine welfare standards.
 - a. Primary Handlers are also responsible for providing a safe and appropriate home environment and ensuring long-term canine welfare.
3. Secondary Handlers provide operational support during authorized deployments and maintain proficiency in handling and deployment protocols.

- a. Secondary Handlers are not responsible for daily care, housing, or ongoing conditioning and shall operate within their approved training and deployment scope.

F. SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1. Supervisors shall:
 - a. Approve or deny employee availability to participate in Support K9 Program activities based on operational needs
 - b. Monitor compliance with this policy
 - c. Address safety or performance concerns
 - d. Review incident reports
- 2. Supervisor approval relates only to employee release and does not constitute deployment authorization.

G. DOCUMENTATION AND REPORTING

- 1. Handlers shall maintain documentation including:
 - a. Deployment logs
 - b. Training records
 - c. Canine health records
- 2. All deployments shall be documented.
- 3. Emotional distress or escalation requiring staff intervention shall be documented.
 - a. The handler shall document incidents occurring during deployment.
 - b. Incidents identified after the interaction shall be documented by the involved staff in accordance with Department reporting procedures.
- 4. Documentation shall not include investigative findings, evidence identification, or search-related reporting.
- 5. Incidents involving injury, property damage, or safety concerns shall be reported in accordance with Department reporting policies.
- 6. Injury incidents include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Bites, scratches, or skin breaks
 - b. Allergic or medical reactions
 - c. Trips or falls related to canine deployment
 - d. Abnormal canine behavior requiring medical evaluation or workers' compensation documentation
- 7. Program documentation does not replace required Department incident reporting.

H. CANINE WELFARE AND SAFETY

- 1. Support K9 care, housing, transport, veterinary treatment, and inspection shall comply with Department canine welfare standards and ensure a safe, stable, and appropriate environment for the canine.
- 2. Handlers are responsible for maintaining the health, safety, and well-being of the assigned Support K9 at all times.

3. Support K9 housing shall provide adequate space, shelter, temperature control, and protection from environmental hazards, whether in the handler's residence or an approved kennel environment.
4. Support K9s shall be secured when unattended and remain under the control and supervision of the handler during interactions with others.
5. When in Department facilities, Support K9s shall be maintained in a controlled environment.
6. When not actively engaged in an approved interaction or deployment, Support K9s shall be secured in an appropriate kennel, crate, or designated handler-controlled space and shall not be allowed to roam freely.
7. Handlers shall immediately report any illness, injury, behavioral concern, or safety issue involving the Support K9 in accordance with Department policy.
8. The Department may conduct scheduled or as-needed inspections of housing conditions, equipment, and overall canine welfare to ensure compliance with established standards.
9. Any significant changes to the canine's living environment, care, or condition that may impact the canine's readiness or suitability for deployment shall be reported to the Support K9 Program.
10. Support K9s may be transported in both Department-authorized and personal vehicles, as necessary to support program operations.
 - a. Handlers transporting a Support K9 shall ensure the vehicle provides adequate ventilation, temperature control, and a safe means of securing the canine during transport.
 - b. Personal vehicles may be used for transport to and from work; however, Department-authorized vehicles should be used for official deployments when available.
 - c. Support K9s shall not be left unattended in a vehicle under conditions that may pose a risk to the canine's health or safety.
 - d. Any transport-related safety concern or incident shall be reported in accordance with Department policy.

ATTACHMENTS / REFERENCES

Support K9 Handler Training Matrix
Deployment Log Template
Incident Reporting Procedures