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# Llama-Alpaca Behavior Packet

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# About this Packet

This packet is intended to provide both general as well as evaluation-specific information for both Pet Partners prospective/existing handlers and Pet Partners team evaluators. Some sections include reference to which audience may be particularly interested in that material; however, the entire contents are useful to both audiences.

## Llama/Alpaca Introduction and Behavior

### General Considerations and Information about the Species at Large

Llamas and alpacas can, with proper training and the right attitude, be well suited for visiting in therapy animal programs. Pet Partners does accept llamas and alpacas as registered Pet Partners therapy animal teams. Accordingly, evaluators may be asked to evaluate a llama or alpaca. As with all kinds of animals, **no one** should test an animal without being familiar with their behavior.

Additional information can be obtained from individuals utilizing their animals as companions, fancier groups, organizations, local shows and competition, and breeders, etc.

Llamas and alpacas (smaller in size) are a member of the camelid family; and have differing personalities. For ease of use, this document will use llama/alpaca and camelid interchangeably. Llamas and alpacas can be trained like many pet species for a variety of tasks. They are herd animals that generally do not enjoy being by themselves. Llamas can be trained to carry packs. However, they should not carry packs or humans when doing therapy visits. Alpacas being smaller usually are not worked as pack animals but are generally kept for their wool. Llamas may be utilized for showing, packing, driving, 4-H/FFA, fiber, therapy work and more. Alpacas may be used for showing, fiber, 4-H/FFA and therapy work. Not every animal is suited to these jobs and careful consideration should be used when evaluating camelids.

Not all camelids function well when separated from their herd; when selecting a therapy animal, it is important to find an independent animal that is comfortable being removed from their herd and enjoys human interaction. Animals that are not properly selected can be a liability and could possibly hurt the people to whom they intended to provide comfort.

Camelids are a prey animal with eyes on either side of their heads. They are very alert, curious, tend to be quiet and calm and will notice virtually anything around their environment. An animal that is startled will either run or kick usually as an initial reaction or band together in a group. Llamas can sometimes be kept as guards for other pasture stock as they will alert to and chase predators. Llamas specifically trained to guard cannot be registered with Pet Partners.

A camelid with advanced skills will respond to subtle signals on the lead for precise movements forward, backward, to the side, etc.

Camelids do not always appreciate – but can learn to tolerate - having their faces, legs, feet or rear area touched. Llamas/alpacas should respond to being petted all over their body, including their heads, without extreme avoidance behaviors, threatening to or actually spitting or kicking. They should not make sudden or wide movements but should instead be predictable. Great care must be taken to train them to prevent these behaviors and to assure the safety of people that are receiving therapy visits.

Most llamas are careful about where they choose to defecate, but not all are. It is important to know which are reliable and for handlers to realize the signs of needing a break.

Camelids' feet are split into two toenails with soft bottom pads like a dog. This type of foot provides excellent traction in their precarious mountainous habitats. The toes and pads need to be trimmed monthly if the animal is not kept on a surface that naturally wears down the feet. Care should be taken when walking on shiny surfaces that have been polished. Some llamas may slip or go up on their toes when uncertain, so care should be taken when visiting nursing facilities or hospitals where floors are polished.

Llamas communicate by demonstrating various physical signs. A nose in the air with ears pinned is a signal that they are threatening or about to spit. A tail held high and neck that is stretched and upright is an indication of posturing or potential fear. Llama ears may be rested and back, but if flat and coupled with a nose raised, indicates displeasure with what something. Ears should never be pinned back for more than a short period as this is indication of displeasure or stress, especially when coupled with humming. Humming can be an indication of concern, needing to go to the bathroom, stress or some sort of displeasure. Humming off and on for a few minutes is acceptable, but no camelid should continue to hum for long periods of time, especially if other signs of posturing or potential fear are being exhibited.

Camelids with medium to long fiber are usually shorn to keep them comfortable in very warm climates. They do not thrive in extreme climates - hot or cold. Their natural environment is between 10 degrees and 70 degrees. Anything outside that range can make them quite uncomfortable. Living, traveling and visiting conditions should take this into consideration. Proper shelter from the weather and temperatures will be needed in locations with climates outside their normal range.

It is not acceptable to have a therapy camelid that is matted or has fiber that is obviously unkempt. Routine grooming should always be done on therapy llamas to present a neat, well cared for and clean appearance. Bathing is suggested whenever weather permits and at all other times extensive blowing to remove debris should be done. Brushing out should always follow this process. Toenails should be trimmed at least monthly. Routine parasite screening (fecal analysis) should be done on all therapy animals at a minimum of every twelve months.

## Behavior Considerations

### **Signs of Fear or Stress**

If the evaluator notices *more* than two signs of stress, testing should be discontinued. Evaluators should pay attention to any behaviors they feel show that the animal may not be suitable for therapy work. For example, initially the camelid may hum and have a wrinkle under the eye, but these may readily disappear when the camelid understands what is happening.

- ▶ Humming (especially lower frequency tones)
- ▶ Screaming - medium frequency, very loud, usually in conjunction with wide eyes and head high with neck straight up and stiff.
- ▶ Tense muscle wrinkle on face below eye
- ▶ Ability to see red tissue on the underside of the lower eyelid (like the eyelid is pulled back by the facial muscles)
- ▶ Some camelids have a genetic defect causing their lids to droop all the time.
- ▶ Ears pinned back (not laid back, but pinned flat to back of head/neck)
- ▶ Large and wide open eyes
- ▶ Drooling
- ▶ Flared nostrils
- ▶ Rapid breathing
- ▶ Tail clamped down tightly against body
- ▶ Head pulled back and nose up pointing directly at you (watch out for a spit!)
- ▶ Leaning away from you
- ▶ Stomping rear feet or kicking
- ▶ Spitting
- ▶ Spinning or moving quickly away from handler/evaluator and or assistants.
- ▶ Walking rapidly and dragging handler around
- ▶ Inability to stand still

### **Signs of Interest or Alertness**

- ▶ Ears forward or relaxed to the side or back
- ▶ Sniffing the evaluator/testers initially
- ▶ Camelid interacts with evaluator/therapy assistant in pleasant manner, showing interest.
- ▶ Camelid stands quietly for touching or other interactions.
- ▶ Camelid shows observation of individuals around them and stands quietly. (makes no move to walk into them, kick, cluck, spit, threaten with nose in air)
- ▶ Camelid watches with interest without being overly animated or scared.
- ▶ Due to their eyesight, camelids may need to cock head to one side to see something close by feet. Should do so calmly without moving away.

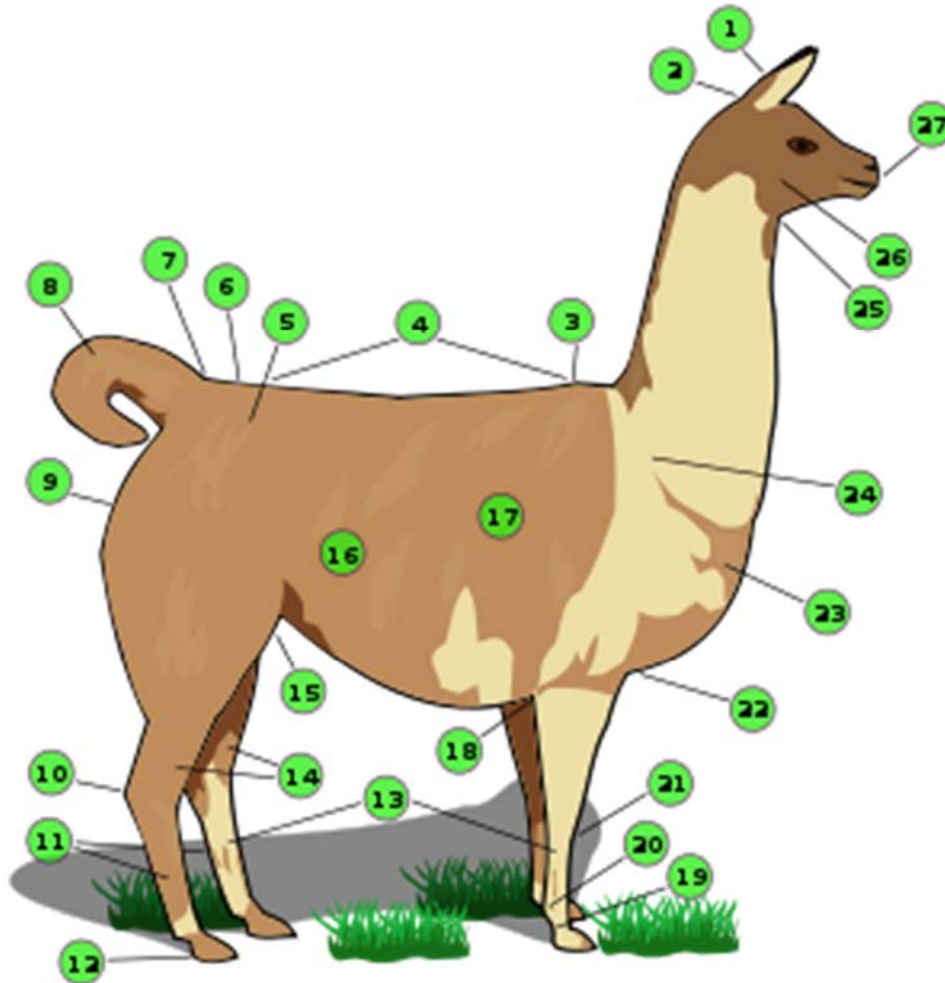
## Evaluation Overview

The Pet Partners [Evaluation Overview - Llamas/Alpacas](#) is a resource developed for handlers to increase understanding of the evaluation exercises. Evaluators are encouraged to review it prior to evaluating a llama or alpaca

# Camelid Supplement to Policies and Procedures

- ▶ Camelids should be able to walk up stairs and through doorways and hallways, so these things should not hamper their ability to arrive at an evaluation site. The camelid should also be able to walk on wooden, concrete and linoleum/vinyl flooring with different (visual) patterns.
- ▶ When first interacting with camelids, it is important to walk up to the animal much like someone in the public setting would. While approaching the camelid, special attention should also be paid to the handler to see how they handle and prepare their animal for the pending visit. A good handler always has an eye on their animal and is also observing and interacting with the individual or individuals approaching directing them as to how best approach and ultimately pet the animal. Initial contact might involve touching the camelid on the front or back of the neck or top of the back near the neck. Safety should always be first and foremost in the handler's mind. One careless move could seriously injure someone that may already have health limitations. No camelid should ever receive "passing/ready" scores if the evaluator doesn't feel 100% safe about it doing therapy work or they do not feel the handler was proactive enough to ease client's fears or possible apprehensions.
- ▶ Camelid testing needs to be inside or at a facility with walls, roof and floor that is not dirt. Evaluators who have trouble finding space could ask the handler to assist. However, if it is somewhere they are familiar or have practiced/trained, the team may only receive a predicable rating.
- ▶ Camelids cannot be evaluated at their home as you may not get an accurate read of the animal's skills and aptitudes as Camelids are herd animals and their herds may be nearby. It is best if when testing they are the only camelid from their home as you may not get the best read if there are other camelids nearby.
- ▶ At the testing facility, evaluators can get a feel for the handler and animal by first observing them from a distance prior to the actual evaluation. As with any evaluation, evaluators should remind the handler that the evaluation begins the moment they arrive at the facility and are exiting their vehicle. Evaluators can then watch for harsh action on the part of the handler (jerking the lead rope, hitting, yelling), which can result in a Not Ready or Not Appropriate score.
- ▶ Additional items required for a camelid evaluation:
  - Extra chairs to create the simulated door way.
  - A leave it toy which will be attractive to a camelid such as a large ball or children's beach bucket
  - Acceptable treat such as a carrot or apple.

# Camelid Anatomy



**1** ears – **2** poll – **3** withers – **4** back – **5** hip – **6** croup – **7** base of tail – **8** tail – **9** buttock – **10** hock  
 – **11** metatarsal gland – **12** heel – **13** cannon bone – **14** gaskin – **15** stifle joint – **16** flank –  
**17** barrel – **18** elbow – **19** pastern – **20** fetlock – **21** Knee – **22** Chest – **23** point of shoulder –  
**24** shoulder – **25** throat – **26** cheek or jowl – **27** muzzle