



## 7. Therapy room and design

### Indoor areas

- *Room size:*
  - Ensure enough space to make optimal use of AAA/AAT. E.g. contact exercises, agility course, search games, hide and seek, etc.
  - Minimum 16m<sup>2</sup> or more depending on the patient, the dog, the goals and if exercises are involved.
  - Take wheelchair users into account (minimum 85cm for the doorways and minimum 170cm for turning).
  - Storage area (for equipment): make sure there are hooks on the walls in the therapy room so that some of the equipment (for example, hoops, bowling pins, etc.) are easily accessible, and/or a locked closet in the therapy room to store everything and/or a separate storage space.
  
- *Floor (anti-slip floors and no porous material) (Kohier, 2011):*
  - Preferably use materials that are even, easy to clean and can withstand lots of cleaning such as:
    - a non-slip laminate floor with a relief for hygiene, home-like feeling and easy cleaning.
    - a polyurethane poured floor or tile carpeting with a closed structure.
    - a short-pile nylon carpet made with a closed pvc back.
    - a polished cement floor (caution: due to the porous structure of cement, it must be protected against moisture and dirt seeping in).
  - To prevent the substrate from being too slippery, rough carpet can be laid on top. This can be done, for example, using Velcro so that the carpet can be removed and washed.
  - Rubber mats can also be used (they provide more grip but are difficult to clean).
  - A “platform” that the dog can walk on so that the patient can reach the dog without having to lean over or squat down.
  - No thresholds higher than 2cm (wheelchair users).
  
- *Walls:*



## Zorgbeest

- Painted with chlorinated rubber coating or with a standard commercially available paint, lacquered to make it easy to clean.
- *Windows:*
  - Use frosted glass in some areas to bring in the positive influence of the green environment. The partial frosted glass also means less distraction for the dogs.
- *Noise:*
  - Lots of noise often causes stress in dogs. Therefore using sound-damping materials in the construction/renovation of the AAI areas (both for external noise and echoing from inside noises) is recommended.
- *Lighting* (Herron & Schreyer, 2014):
  - The room is adequately lit with natural light and LED lighting (Kohler, 2011).
  - Be cautious of light reflections on shiny floors (some dogs can be fearful of this - laying down rugs is then necessary).
  - The dog's resting place may be a bit darker.
  - Take into account the flicker fusion threshold + the ultrasonic sound (for example, avoid TL lighting).
- *Ventilation:*
  - The rooms must be well ventilated (Kohler, 2011); Open a window in good time or make sure there is a ventilation system.
- *Temperature:*
  - The room temperature must be checked before starting an AAI session (Kohler, 2011).
  - The room temperature in the indoor space is between 18°C and 22°C (a healthy room temperature for a dog is between 10°C and 20°C).
  - Dogs are particularly sensitive to abrupt changes in temperature.
  - No sessions if the temperature is above 25°C to prevent heat exhaustion.
  - It is also important that the dog does not lie on a cold floor or in a damp room. Preferably provide a number of different resting places (e.g. mat and floor) so that the dog can choose where he or she wants to lie at that moment.



## Zorgbeest

- Insulate the room.
- *Odours:*
  - Neutralise odours as much as possible.
  - Use aromatherapy (in particular lavender and camomile) for odours and for a relaxing effect (Graham et al., 2005). Also use cleaning products with those scents.
- *Room hygiene:*
  - The room must be cleaned daily or before starting an AAI session, depending on the pathology of the patient.
  - Choose a room that can be cleaned easily and thoroughly (Ophorst, 2014).
  - Choose a cleaning product, a disinfectant and cleansing solution based on chlorhexidine and cetrimide such as HAC (Hospital Antiseptic Concentrate).
- *Safety:*
  - Make sure the entire area is safe for both dogs and humans (e.g. no slippery floors, sharp edges, protrusions, dangerous stairs, glass objects, heaters, etc.).
  - Caution: some floors can become as slippery as a skating rink with, e.g. water spills.
- *Furniture:*
  - Durable.
  - Waterproof.
  - Can be disinfected (e.g. imitation leather).
  - Adapt the furniture to the activities with the dogs and to the patients' pathology (Kohler, 2011).
- *Toys and accessories:*
  - Durable.
  - Large enough and without small pieces that the dog (and/or child) can swallow.
  - Washable.
  - Avoid toys and equipment with red colours (dogs cannot see red).



## Zorgbeest

- *Plants:*
  - Avoid flower pots (dogs may want to mark their territory) and prohibit poisonous plants (Kohler, 2011).
- *Relieving area:*
  - Plant several trees/bushes near the entrance to the building.
  - Or opt for a dog toilet. Naturally, faeces must be cleaned up and deposited in a bag (possibly a “poop pole”: a long tube that collects the bags underground), but even then the smell of the accumulated urine may be deterring to some dogs. Nevertheless, the presence of a dog toilet is often extremely useful, also as a reminder to the owners that they must give their dog a break to relieve himself or herself.
  - Avoid any possible places indoor that could be used to mark territory (flower pots, panels, etc.). An intact male may want to mark his territory...
- *Drinking area:*
  - Provide a bowl of water where it is easily accessible.
  - Preferably ceramic or stainless steel.
- *Rest area:*
  - **Provide a calm area in the therapy room away from all the stimuli where the dog can retreat whenever he or she wishes.** Put the dog’s crate, blanket, cushion, etc. there (Fine et al., 2015).

## Outdoor area

- *Size:*
  - Ensure enough space to make optimal use of AAA/AAT. E.g. contact exercises, agility course, search games, hide and seek, etc.
  - Between 50m<sup>2</sup> and 70m<sup>2</sup> or more depending on the patient, the dog, the goals and if exercises are involved.
- *Landscape elements:*
  - Grass, sand, pond, trees, shrubs, hills/height differences.
- *Fencing:*



## Zorgbeest

- High and strong enough so that the dogs cannot get out and to ensure that the patients' privacy is respected.

### **Environment**

- Enquire about adjoining rooms and the activities that take place (Kohier, 2011) so that these do not disturb the AAI sessions.  
In the case of undesired behaviour by the dog, a change in the environment can sometimes prevent the behaviour (e.g. if he or she does not have enough of an overview from his or her resting area).