

Shenandoah spreads sunshine, and sometimes startles hospital staff

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August 2009. Kira was so excited to finally meet Shenandoah that once we got to training at 4 Paws, she couldn't wait for the formal introduction, but went and found Shenandoah in her crate. She stayed right there giving Shenandoah treats until it was time for the formal introductions.

Kira just loves dogs, and seems to have a strong connection with them. During our training with the [4 Paws for Ability March Miracles Class of 2009](#), she visited all of the dogs that were housed on site, stopping to say "Hi," and give treats. She sometimes stopped to ask the dogs, "What's wrong?" when she heard them barking or whining, which is impressive in itself for a child on the autism spectrum.

Kira is a runner, and likes to dash away. She excelled at this during training. I was amazed at how quickly Shenandoah bonded to Kira. This big, beautiful dog watched Kira like a hawk during training whenever she would dash across the room towards an exit, or when she would have a meltdown, even if she was across the room.

Now, months later, Shenandoah continues to keep an eye on Kira, and if Kira starts running off, Shenandoah will run to head her off. **I've even caught Shenandoah keeping a careful watch on other small children who were running off by themselves.**

Tethering

The tethering skill continues to be a real gift to our family on a day-to-day basis. Kira hates having her hand held, and will twist her arm/hand to get out of all but the strongest holds. If you do a "death grip" on her, she will often throw herself to the floor or scream loudly.

She does not mind being tethered to Shenandoah, and will—most of the time—happily follow along in tow.

This allows us to take Kira out more often shopping and on walks (also extremely helpful in airports when traveling).

If we get stuck waiting in line, which Kira has never tolerated well, she will sit down on the ground with Shenandoah and cuddle or play with her.



Tracking

The tracking skills came in very handy when my mother was meeting Kira at the bus, and didn't grab Kira's hand quickly enough. Kira took off faster than my mother (who is over 70) could go. My mother did not know where the dog's tracking equipment was, so just let Shenandoah out of the door and told her to go get Kira. Shenandoah went straight for Kira, headed her off, and slowed her down until my mother could catch up.

Behavior Disruption

The behavior disruption is a work in progress as Kira and Shenandoah bond, and as we determine which of Shenandoah's behaviors work the best for Kira. Initially it was licking, but Kira sometimes objects to that.

Kira loves to have Shenandoah give her a "bow" (play bow with the front legs extended). Shenandoah has figured this out on her own, so without us asking her to do this behavior, she will come running when she hears Kira screaming or having a meltdown, and will bow in front of her.

This is often enough on its own to distract Kira. If not, we try some of the many other behaviors Shenandoah was trained to do, and some we have trained her to do.

Shenandoah has been able to disrupt all but the worst meltdowns. **One time when Kira was really upset, she sought out Shenandoah, who was under the table, cuddled up with her head resting on her dog, and calmed herself right down.**



Hospital Comfort and Chuckles

Since we got Shenandoah last March Kira has been hospitalized for seizures several times. Shenandoah has been such a blessing, and such a comfort to Kira. Kira asks for Shenandoah to be with her up on the bed, and cuddles with her or uses her for a pillow.



The ER always needs to insert an IV to take blood samples for seizure drug levels and to use for quick application of medications. Kira has had so many IV insertions and blood draws that her veins are now very difficult to get IV's in. It almost always takes multiple tries.

Kira will cuddle next to Shenandoah, and the ER staff works around her.

The staff members were amazed at how much calmer Kira was with Shenandoah there with her.

When Kira starts getting *really* restless as her emergency drugs wear off, she gets irritable and tries to pull her IV out. **Having Shenandoah in the bed with her calms her down and makes the hospital stay easier for all of us.**

Shenandoah is so incredibly well behaved through all of this. Several times, she has startled a nurse or a doctor when she moved: they thought she was a large stuffed animal.

Recap

Finally, I have to comment on how wonderful, patient, and calm Shenandoah is. Kira likes to explore all parts of Shenandoah, including putting her fingers in her mouth and down her ears, and playing with her belly. Shenandoah has never bitten her, and will get up and walk away when it gets to be too much.

During one of Kira's complex partial seizures, Shenandoah was curled up right next to Kira, and Kira grabbed a handful of skin and fur on Shenandoah in her seizure-clenched hand. Shenandoah stayed calm (although her eyes opened wide) while I pried Kira's fingers off.

She didn't bark, growl, or bite. I couldn't believe it.

We are still in amazement at what a great, well trained, sweet dog Shenandoah is, and what a great match she is to our family. We love that dog, and don't know what we ever did without her. I cannot say enough good things about 4 Paws: the quality of the training, our experience with the staff and with our training, and with the supportive network of families!

