

Orientation to Visits

What to Expect Before, During and After Visits

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PRE – VISIT

- Dog should be groomed. This means brushed or bathed, nails, ears and teeth. Do the nails two days in advance and bath a day in advance so that nails are not sharp and you have had a chance to remove excess hair. The facility you are visiting may have a policy about bathing.
- Exercise if need be. If you have a young dog that needs to romp and play or even an old dog that needs to get out and stretch, let it do so before asking the dog to sit quietly in a stimulating situation.
- Make sure you are prepared with necessary dog equipment and that it is also clean. This may mean books, bed (paws up) blanket/towel, treat tray and or toys for tricks.
- Make sure you are properly attired. (Club shirt and neat jeans or khaki pants or skirt)
- Know what is required by the facility: background checks, a copy of our insurance policy and TB tests might be required. Make sure all of that is in order. Ask the facility lead person.
- Be prepared for the type of facility you are going to visit.
- Also know what is going to be expected of you and your dog on this visit. EX; does the facility have goals that they are trying to meet with this population? This information can come from your lead person on the visit.
- Of course, directions time and place.

THE FACILITY

- First visits or visits with young or new dogs should only last as much as the dog can handle or a little less. Preferably a little less. 15 – 30 minutes is not a bad way to introduce your dog to therapy work. Even though we can train for these situations, as we all know, when doing the big show we all get a little nervous. If you leave the facility with a happy, relaxed dog, he/she will want to come back.
- Arrive 10 minutes early, so the group can meet and greet. The humans have a chance to say Hello, as well as our canine volunteers.

- Make sure your dog has used the bathroom before going in. It is not sanitary and does not leave a good impression, if this happens inside the facility.
- Once the visit has started the dogs should no longer be visiting with each other unless this is part of a trick. Every one should be concentrating on the people we came to see.
- Make sure personnel are available to you or you know how to reach someone in a very timely manner.
- Always ask if the person wants to see the dog before entering a room, approaching or putting the dog on someone's lap or bed. The last thing we want to do is make anyone uncomfortable.
- If you do put a dog on a lap or bed, or have your dog put its paws on a bed, make sure you use your lap blanket. This is for their protection as well as your dog's.
- Clients may give treats to the dog, at the handler's discretion and with great care for biting, scratching or slobbering on hands. Remember our clients probably do not have the best reflexes. An option for safety is to use a treat dish (can be a target lid). This may be a good option for some.
- An incident report must be submitted to the Board if any type of situation occurs during a visit. (EX; a client is accidentally nipped while giving a treat, someone is knocked over, or an IV is pulled out). You will have to cease visiting until the Board reviews the report and makes a decision.
- Most important listen to your dog. If he/she says something is not right, make sure you assess the current situation. Your dog might be telling you something is happening right now or your dog might not be comfortable in this setting. We have plenty of different places to visit.
- Make sure you and your companion are prepared for the situation in which he/she is grabbed poked or hurt. If you have practiced for these situations, your dog will know what to expect and how to handle it. All our dogs should be forgiving when accidentally hurt. But if a stranger has clumsy hands all around the dog, or is even yelling at you, it helps the dog if you have practiced something similar.

AFTER THE VISIT

- After your dog has been visiting and made everyone's day, it is time for you to make his or her day. Dogs soak up a lot of emotion during these visits and they need a break.

- Stress can ruin a great therapy dog.

SIGNS OF STRESS

- Excessive drooling
 - Barking at nothing
 - Displacement behavior (do not correct your dog for doing, you need that information)
 - Excessive whining
 - Excessive hair loss
 - Reacting to people (barking or snapping at)
 - Backing off a visit, not wanting to be touched
 - Or complete shutdown (dog goes on visit, lays in corner not doing anything)
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- Dog/handler teams should be going out a maximum of 2 times a week, depending on the type of visits.
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- Most organizations suggest only one hour work each week. This may be more appropriate for young, new or older dogs, and for dogs that do high stress visits.