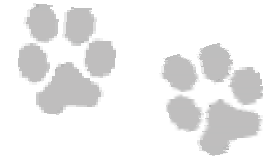


Therapy Dog Manual

4. VISITATIONS



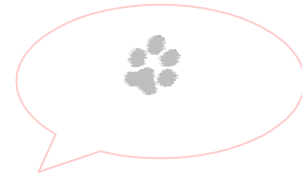
A. General Tips

You will be meeting all kinds of interesting people during your visits – each of them an individual person with feelings and potential. Following are some general tips to use while you visit:

- 👉 Avoid talking down to people. Treat every person you visit as you would like to be treated – with respect.
- 👉 Be considerate and listen – you may become aware of a person’s interests and talents which could be used to further encourage them.
- 👉 Avoid judging people or their families.
- 👉 Remember that as a volunteer, you are not there to play the role of social worker, nurse, pastor, medical doctor or lawyer. Your role is to be friendly, courteous and sensitive to the needs of the person you are visiting – be yourself.
- 👉 Try to be dependable, but never promise more than you know you can deliver.
- 👉 Many times you will be in a medical or nursing home environment, which has paid professional services. Be aware that some patients or residents have “DNR” or “Do Not Resuscitate” orders. If you notice someone in need of medical assistance, contact a staff member. Even if you have first aid qualifications, DO NOT assist a patient or resident.
- 👉 When you first meet someone, comment on something tangible, such as something new in the room or what the person is wearing.
- 👉 Watch and listen attentively – the person you are visiting will often provide subtle cues to help you develop a friendship with them.
- 👉 Use touch as a means of communication, but only if the person you are visiting is comfortable with it. Guiding the person to pet your dog or feel its fur or scratch its nose provides non-threatening opportunities for touching.
- 👉 Remember that information about the person and their family is confidential. But never promise that you will not tell anyone something they tell you – use your discretion to determine if information needs to be passed on to the facility supervisor or your Coordinator.
- 👉 Some people may become so absorbed in your visit that you may find it difficult to leave. Explain honestly that someone else is waiting for a visit from you and your dog, or that your dog needs to go outside to relieve itself.
- 👉 Allow for changes from one visit to another in a patient’s or resident’s frame of mind or acceptance of you or your dog.
- 👉 Remember that no two visits will be the same.
- 👉 Remember your dog’s safety – check the room for potential hazards for your dog (e.g. medications within reach, spills, broken glass).

B. Conversation Starters

You may sometimes have difficulty starting a conversation with the people you visit. The following may help:



[1] Your Animal

- Draw attention to your dog: “Would you like to meet Rusty, my dog?”; “Look who I brought to visit you today!”
- Allow your dog to lead. If eye contact is made, the person you are visiting may call the animal. Follow from there.
- Speak on behalf of your animal: “Sherman wants to know if you would like to pet him.”
- Explain your animal’s actions: “Molly must like you, because her ears are perked up and she is wagging her tail”; “Sailor wants you to pat him some more.”
- Ask the person you are visiting to talk about your dog: “How does her coat feel?”; “What do you think he wants?”

[2] The Past

- Ask where the person was born.
- Tell the person some places where you have lived.
- Ask about the patient’s/resident’s school days.
- Enquire about their past occupation.
- Ask how their world was: families, entertainment, transportation, etc.
- Find out whether they had pets, and be inquisitive about them.

[3] The Present

- Ask about favourite foods, television shows, music, movies, sports.
- Find out about the person’s hobbies and current interests.
- Enquire about books and magazines that may interest the patient/resident.
- Comment on something the person is wearing or using, or something in the room.
- Ask what they have done in the last couple of days.
- Ask if they would like you to visit again.

[4] Yourself

- Be sensitive to asking the patient/resident too many questions about themselves – they may not be accustomed to very much interaction.
- Make yourself an interesting visitor – tell the patient/resident stories about yourself, your family, your hobbies or your pet.
- You may have to share a story about yourself to get a story.
- Bring a small photograph album to stimulate conversation.
- Be cautious that the visit does not become one entirely about you – be aware of non-verbal cues from the patient/resident that may indicate their lack of interest.

C. Listening Skills

Most of your visits will probably focus on your dog's interaction with patients/residents. There will probably be times during which the person wants to tell you things, and active listening skills will help you encourage this:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">👉 Sit or stand within close proximity of the person (three to five feet).👉 Maintain eye contact – look them in the eye, and position yourself so they can look at you comfortably.👉 Provide a body language that says you are listening: lean forward, reach out, maintain a relaxed stance. Avoid fidgeting, looking around, crossing your arms or looking at your watch.👉 Ensure your facial expression matches what is being said by either you or the person you are visiting.👉 Respond appropriately with smiles or laughter when the person is using humour. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">👉 Avoid being judgmental, giving advice or providing your opinion.👉 Listen and respond to feeling. For example:
Resident: I had a dog once.
Volunteer: Your dog was special to you?
Resident: It was hit by a car and died.
Volunteer: You must have been very sad.👉 Use phrases such as “It sounds as if ...”, “You must have felt ...”, “You must like it when ...” to help them describe their feelings. |
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D. Appropriate and Inappropriate Responses

The way in which you respond in your conversations with patients/residents will often determine the direction of the conversation, or whether the person even wishes to continue. The following will help determine appropriate and inappropriate methods of response:

- Show genuine interest when asking questions, and provide honest answers when people ask you questions.
- It is not important to correct small misunderstandings due to hearing loss or memory impairment.
- Praise, agreement, approval or compliments are almost always welcome.
- When someone is sharing their feelings with you, it is appropriate to support them by restating their expressed feelings (e.g. “That must have made you feel disappointed”). Avoid denying or talking the person out of their feelings.
- It is generally inappropriate to provide advice, suggestions or solutions to a patient's/resident's problem.
- Avoid ordering, directing or commanding the person unless the situation warrants it (e.g. “You're hurting the dog. Please let go of his tail”).
- When instructing the person for the welfare of the dog or comfort of the visit, avoid influencing them with too many facts, arguments, logic, or your opinion.
- Avoid telling the patient/resident what their motives are or interpreting why they said or did something.
- Avoid questioning the person to the point of probing or interrogating them. It can be unpleasant for them and is inappropriate.
- Never admonish or threaten the person you are visiting. It is appropriate, however, to warn them about how your dog may behave (e.g. licking, liking treats).

- Avoid stereotyping, name-calling, ridiculing or shame.
- Avoid criticism, disagreement, placing blame or judging negatively – including the person you visit, a staff member, a fellow volunteer or the facility.



E. Cognitively Impaired Persons

You and your dog may have a cognitively impaired person on your visitation list. The following may make your visits more effective for all of you:

- Approach the person from the front, never from behind.
- Use eye contact to gain their full attention.
- Choose a quiet, non-distracting setting if possible.
- Each time you visit, introduce yourself and your dog.
- Speak in a slow, calm, reassuring tone of voice. Use simple words and short sentences. Avoid speaking loudly unless the person also has a hearing impairment.
- Communicate one message at a time and wait for responses.
- Ensure any instructions are clear and simple.
- If you are not understood, rephrase your question or comment.
- Avoid asking difficult questions for which there is no easy response.
- Respond to the person's feelings by reassuring them. Accept incorrect responses without correction, and don't take accusations personally.
- Ask staff for background information about the patient/resident to help find appropriate topics of conversation.



F. Persons With Memory Loss

Some older patients/residents may experience memory loss or confusion. The following may help when you visit them:

- Use visual props that will keep them in touch with the present (e.g. clocks, calendars).
- Sit by a window and use the weather or signs of the season to provide current topics of conversation.
- Add some routine into your visits – try visiting on the same day of each week or at the same time of day; begin each visit with the same activity.
- Give choices from which to select an answer rather than an open-ended question. The patient/resident may not recall the answer, but may recognize it.
- Use a variety of sensory cues that stimulate all the senses. For example, if you are talking about baking, bring a home-baked treat to taste, a cookbook to look at, recipes to read aloud, spices to smell, or a wooden spoon to hold and touch. If bringing a home-baked treat, check with facility staff first (to check for allergies or other dietary concerns, or facility policies).
- Always be honest and realistic with the person you are visiting.
- Participate in activities or conversations that focus on the patient's/resident's lifelong roles, interests and experiences.
- Always treat the person you are visiting as an adult, even when it appears they are acting like a child.

- Keep your conversation and activities short and simple; give very simple directions.
- Remember that the dog will often take the lead, and conversations may be about the dog alone.

G. Wheelchair Awareness

You will undoubtedly encounter wheelchair-bound patients/residents during your visitations. Generally, you will not be moving them, as this is the responsibility of facility staff. It is important for you to be aware of the following when visiting someone who is in a wheelchair:

- Ensure the wheelchair brakes are engaged.
- Remember that people in wheelchairs are individuals. They have a wide variety of skills and personalities, and are not necessarily sick, incompetent, dependent, unintelligent or contagious.
- Avoid pitying a person in a wheelchair. It makes them feel devalued.
- If it looks like the person requires help, offer your assistance before doing anything. Don't be offended if your help is not needed. If help is required, or if an incident occurs, alert facility staff.
- Be cautious of wheelchair movements around your dog.
- Avoid standing and looking down on the person in the wheelchair while carrying on a conversation. Pull up a chair alongside them.
- Remember to use all your conversational skills to cope with wheelchair-bound people.
- Small dogs can often be placed in the lap of a wheelchair-bound patient. Larger dogs should be encouraged to sit beside the wheelchair, but within easy reach of the patient.

H. Dog Treats

Most patients wish to feed a visiting dog. This should be rigidly controlled as sometimes patients may feed their meals or medications to the animal. It is advisable to have your own treats to substitute. Give the patient these treats to "feed" the dog. Use your own discretion as to how much and how often treats are offered.

