

Alliance of Therapy Dogs

HELPFUL HINTS & TIPS

- 1. Is it a good fit?** If possible, it's a good idea for an interested applicant to observe an ATD handler/dog team during a facility visit before undergoing the ATD Test. This is an opportunity for applicants to get an idea of what the facilities are like and to better evaluate if this will be a positive experience for their dogs and for them. It might be helpful to discuss with the T/O which locations might be best suited for you at your current level of experience.
- 2. Proof of good health and vaccinations:** Remember to take written proof of the dog's vaccination records to have them readily available at each visit, either in the car or on your person. Some facilities will ask to see and make a copy of such papers for their own records. It is not only handy, but rather impressive, when you can hand them a neat, tidy and organized notebook or envelope. Staff will appreciate that you clearly have your act together, making you and your dog a welcomed volunteer team.
- 3. Self and dog health check:** Handlers should evaluate their dogs' health and attitude, as well as their own, prior to every visit.
- 4. Olfactory sensitivity:** Avoid using perfumes, colognes, and other scented oils on both the handler and the dog. Handlers want to look and smell their best when taking their dogs to visit, but it is also important to remember some individuals may have severe allergies to these products. Handlers who smoke or are exposed to smokers should minimize their smoke exposure before entering a facility. Never try to cover smoke or other odors with perfume or scented oils. Therapy dog teams are the visitors and must be cognizant of the comfort of those being visited.
- 5. Dogs allowed? No dogs allowed?** While visiting with your dog in a facility, know the areas where you and your dog are allowed and welcomed. Always check in at the nurse's station so everyone is aware of you and your special therapy dog.
- 6. Doggy accidents:** Always clean up after your dog, both inside and outside of the facility. Ask where there is a safe, outside location in which you may walk or rest your dog. Never leave any traces of your dog after a visit.
- 7. Different flooring:** ATD strongly recommends that your dog become accustomed to walking on a variety of different surfaces. Always consider the footing before asking your dog to perform tricks or moves.
- 8. Shhhhh – and smile:** Give your verbal commands quietly. Always praise your dog for his/her exemplary behavior.
- 9. Water for your dog:** Keep your dog well hydrated. Bring water and bowl. Folding fabric or plastic bowls are perfect for taking along on visits.
- 10. Dog treats:** Although treats are often used during visits, ATD advises against allowing patients or residents to give treats to your dog. Many different types of dog treats are available today. ATD

advises against the use of dog treats that contain peanuts due to the risk that these treats might pose to people with peanut allergies.

- 11. Expect encounters with other dogs and animals:** Be aware that some facilities have their own pets or may allow visiting family pets. Residents may have their own pets as well. These animals may not behave in the same manner as a therapy dog. You may want to find out if there is a visiting time set aside for family pets and try to avoid visiting during that time.
- 12. Respect the dog's space:** Do not let your dog stare (even from a distance) at another dog as this can be a threatening signal to other dogs. Never allow your dog to approach a person's lap or bed when another dog is already there. Take extra precautions in doorways, elevators or any tight confined areas.
- 13. How is your dog really feeling?** Be alert to signs of stress in your dog and yourself. Monitor the body language of your dog for signs of stress, including, but not limited to:
 - Excessive panting
 - Jumping or climbing on you for security
 - Hiding behind you
 - Shaking or developing tremors in the body or legs
 - Pressing the ears and tail close to the body
 - Yawning or changing facial expressions
 - Looking for an escape route or doorway
 - Refusing to socialize
- 14. Dogs need holidays, too:** Taking a few weeks off may be well deserved and can make a difference in the quality of future visits.
- 15. Dogs can say "no:"** Never force your dog to interact with a patient or any patient to interact with your dog. This should be a pleasant experience for you, your dog, and the patient or resident.
- 16. Visiting a room:** Always knock first before entering a patient's room. Ask if s/he would like a visit from your special dog. Never awaken sleeping patients. If the patient is having a meal in the room and wants to visit, excuse yourself and offer to return when s/he has finished the meal.
- 17. Warning signs:** Read and obey all warning signs on room doors, such as "ISOLATION" or "INFECTIOUS, DO NOT ENTER," or "SEE NURSE BEFORE ENTERING." This is important for the patient, your dog, and you.
- 18. What's on the floor?** Be aware of pills, food, or other items on the floor. It is a good idea not to let your dog pick up or even sniff anything, including a treat, that has been dropped on the floor. Keep your dog away from trash containers. A good command to teach your dog is "Leave it!" Avoid areas where cleaning chemicals were recently used.
- 19. Doggy paws and licks:** Always try to hold or guide a resident's exuberant and/or clumsy hand toward your dog for petting as reassurance for both your dog and the person. Remember to hold your dog's paws so the nails do not touch the fragile skin of a patient or resident. If your dog licks,

be aware that not all patients, residents, or staff like this. Never allow your dog to lick someone's face. Watch for the patient who will grab ears, the tail, or the leash. Be ready to protect your dog.

- 20. Wheelchair safety:** Be sure all wheelchair wheels are locked before you bring your dog up to them. You may find it easier to approach someone in a wheelchair from the side.
- 21. Facility's rules:** Be sure you are familiar with all rules and regulations in each facility. If these rules are unclear, ask a staff member or activities director to explain them to you. Ask for a copy of the facility's required protocol for volunteers. Some facilities may have their own pet therapy program and their own testing procedures that are required before you may participate in their program.
- 22. Visiting at Home:** If you are visiting someone in his/her home, there are a few additional steps to take. All ATD rules, regulations, and policies apply as they would for any other scheduled ATD visit. In addition:
 - Ask if there are any pets in the house and, if there are, please have them in another room away from the patient.
 - Request that there be a caregiver, family member, or friend there with the patient when you visit.
 - Don't go alone on the first visit. There are teams that go two at a time to home visits. If that is not an option, then obtain permission to take another adult with you. This person does not have to be an ATD member, just someone you are comfortable with to be an extra set of eyes and ears, such as a spouse, friend, or family member.
- 23. What if YOU have an emergency?** Emergencies happen when we least expect them. Remember, dogs are not allowed in ambulances. You need a plan. Just as you have ICE (In Case of Emergency) numbers in your cellphone, also program in an "ICE for Dog." Whether or not you carry a cellphone, you can keep your dog emergency numbers on a card in your wallet next to your ATD membership card, or with any facility's ID badge that you wear. Be sure others are aware of this and include your vet's number. Without this information, should you suffer an emergency, the institution may have no other choice than to call animal control to come and care for your dog. Be prepared!

We hope you have found these Hints and Tips helpful in your visits with your special dog.
May you find endless happiness in every step you take and in everything you do.

“SHARING SMILES AND JOY”

Alliance of Therapy Dogs