

## Program Pointers

Whether you are just starting out as a therapy dog handler or you are more experienced, here are some key points to keep in mind as part of a Capital Therapy Dogs team.

1. **Health Check.** Make sure both you and your dog are in good health and happy to visit.
2. **Grooming.** You and your dog must be clean and tidy. Avoid using perfumes or heavily scented products as you may be visiting people with allergies.
3. **Equipment.** Check to see that you have proper handling equipment. Some handlers keep a special collar (or harness) and leash for pet therapy work.
4. **Health Records.** Have your dog's rabies certificate and most recent fecal exam results available at every program you attend. Keep the items in your car or carry them with you.
5. **Water.** Bring fresh water and a bowl. You both need to stay hydrated!
6. **Treats.** If you bring treats, it is best to save them for a reward when the program ends. Check with the CTD Program Liaison before using treats during a program.
7. **Potty time!** Arrive early and allow your dog time to potty. Always pick up after your dog.
8. **Priority one = your dog.** Focus on: 1) your dog; 2) your client; and 3) other CTD teams close by. If your dog is stressed at any time, excuse yourself with a smile. If you feel uncomfortable at any time or if another team needs assistance, do the same.
9. **Respect for space.** Maintain a safe space between dogs – at least three feet. Redirect your dog if he/she is staring at another dog (or any animal encountered in the facility). Avoid approaching a client to visit when another dog is already there.
10. **Respect for clients.** Ask if a client would like to visit with your dog, read with your dog, pet your dog, and so forth. It's okay if they say no. Always thank the client for interacting with you and, if applicable, your dog.
11. **Respect for your dog.** If your dog doesn't want to visit with someone, that's perfectly okay.
12. **Approaching other teams.** When joining a visit in progress, make sure teams know you are there. Approach from the front if possible, always maintaining space.
13. **Be YOU!** In some cases, maybe a toned-down you, but the point is relax and have fun. Sing along with clients, ask silly questions about the book they're reading. Make it memorable. However, avoid certain topics such as politics, religion and medical conditions.
14. **Be proactive.** Advocate for your dog with a smile and a kind word. Tell a child the correct way to pet. Take a client's hand and move it away from an area where your dog doesn't like to be touched.
15. **Get on the client's level.** Try to position yourself and your dog so you are on as close to facing the client on their level as possible. Avoid bending over a client. Position your dog at the side of a chair or wheelchair.
16. **Doggy kisses.** Only if a client says it's okay, your dog may kiss on command. Avoid excessive licking.
17. **Room visits.** When engaging in room visits, know the facility rules (e.g., a clean towel may be required for paws or small dogs on beds). Always knock before entering a room and show respect for clients.

18. **What's on the floor?** Cookie crumbs might be okay and your dog might scarf them up before you can do anything, but pills and many other items are bad. Be on the lookout for items on the floor, tucked into pockets and along the sides of wheelchairs.
19. **Face time.** Use extreme caution when allowing your dog to get close to a client's face. Clients, especially children, may lean over your dog and come in close for a hug. If your dog tolerates hugs, instruct clients to hug with their face away from the dog's face.
20. **Breaks are good.** Know the signs of stress and take breaks. End the visit early if you need to, just let the Program Liaison know. Make this a positive activity for you and your dog.
21. **Barks are not so good.** Many dogs bark. A soft bark or two in greeting, once in a while, is not a big deal. Take your dog to the side and quietly correct him/her. Loud or aggressive-sounding barks can scare clients. Immediately remove your dog from the program area and only return to the visit if your dog is under control with no barking.
22. **Lap visits.** Small dogs may visit on laps. It's best to bring a small blanket or towel for lap visits.
23. **Reading dogs.** Your dog should calmly sit or lay on a blanket or mat for reading. Watch for fingers poking your dog or grabbing fur, and correct kindly.
24. **Visitor overload.** At reading programs and destress events, it's common for several clients to engage with your dog all at once. Know what your dog can tolerate and provide firm but kind instructions for interacting with your dog.
25. **Dogs and furniture.** Each facility and program is different, so check with the CTD Program Liaison about allowing dogs on furniture.
26. **Photos.** Check with the CTD Program Liaison about taking photos. Some facilities have photo releases in place and some don't. Adults at library programs often take photos of children reading. Ask them if CTD can use the photos and have them emailed to CTD.
27. **Incident or injury.** Inform the CTD Program Liaison as soon as possible.
28. **Doggy accidents.** Although we try to avoid it, dogs may vomit or have potty accident inside a facility. Take care of this right away by informing the Program Liaison and the facility contact. You may need to do the clean-up or in some cases, the facility may have a protocol that must be followed.