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. **Sign ups.** Access the CTD online calendar in our Volunteer Information Center (VicNet) to sign up for visits and remove yourself from visits if you've signed up but cannot attend. The calendar is an important part of CTD's risk management process, providing documentation of who is where and when.
2. **Health Check.** Make sure both you and your dog are in good health and happy to visit.
3. **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.
4. **Equipment.** Check to see that you have proper, clean handling equipment. We recommend a special collar (or harness) and 6 foot or shorter leash for pet therapy work.
5. **Health Records.** Have your dog's rabies certificate or proof of rabies vaccination available at every program you attend, in your car or on you phone is fine.
6. **Water.** Bring fresh water and a bowl. You both need to stay hydrated!
7. **Treats.** If you bring treats, it is best to save them as a reward when the program ends. Check with the CTD Program Liaison before using treats during a program.
8. **Potty time!** Arrive early and allow your dog time to potty. Always pick up after your dog.
9. **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.
10. **Respect for space**. Maintain a safe space between dogs – at least three feet. Redirect your dog if they are staring at another dog (or any animal encountered in the facility). Avoid approaching a client for a visit when another dog is already there.
11. **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.
12. **Respect for your dog**. If your dog doesn't want to visit with someone, that's perfectly okay.
13. **Approaching other teams**. Make sure teams know you are there. Approach from the side, always maintaining a safe space, which may be greater than three feet.
14. **Be YOU!** In some case, 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 including politics, religion and health.
15. **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 or should not be touched.
16. **Get on the client's level.** Try to position yourself and your dog so you are as close to the client's level as possible. Avoid bending over a client. Position your dog at the side of a chair or wheelchair to avoid reaching and falling.

17. **Doggy kisses**. Only if a client says it's okay, your dog may kiss on command. Avoid excessive licking.
18. **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.
19. **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 wheelchair seats.
20. **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 opposite from the dog's face. Keep a hand on your dog's collar or harness and move your dog away if you sense stress.
21. **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 visits a positive activity for you and your dog.
22. **Barks are not so good**. Dogs bark, it is one way they communicate. A soft bark or two in greeting occasionally on a visit is not a big deal. Take your dog to the side for a break. 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.
23. **Lap visits**. Small dogs may visit on laps if the client agrees. It's best to bring a small blanket or towel for lap visits.
24. **Reading dogs**. Your dog should calmly sit or lay on a blanket or mat for reading programs. Watch for fingers poking your dog or grabbing fur, and correct children kindly.
25. **Visitor overload**. At reading programs, destress events, and some other visits, it's common for several clients or staff 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.
26. **Dogs and furniture**. Each facility and program is different, so check with the CTD Program Liaison about allowing dogs on furniture.
27. **Photos**. Check with the CTD Program Liaison about taking photos. Some facilities use social media and are open to taking photos, and some facilities have confidentiality concerns and do not allow photos at all or showing the face of clients.
28. **Incident or injury**. Inform the CTD Program Liaison as soon as possible.
29. **Doggy accidents**. Although we try to avoid it, dogs may vomit or have potty accidents 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.