

Getting Ready for Your First Therapy Dog Visit



Congratulations! You've completed the red tape and paperwork, gone through orientation and passed the OTD evaluation with your dog. You've observed another therapy dog team and had the help of a mentor. Now, after meeting all the requirements, a suitable placement has been found and, hopefully, a wonderful and satisfying new job lies ahead. It's time for you and your dog to get ready for your first therapy dog visit. Here are a few suggestions to ensure it will be enjoyable, relaxed and successful.

Two Weeks Before

1. Go to the facility with your dog. Walk around outside and get the dog used to the new scents, sights and sounds. Provide lots of positive support and encouragement so your dog will really like these visits. Identify where your dog can relieve him/herself between the parking area and the entrance.

One Week Before

Visit the facility without your dog to get a sense of the physical environment. Meet with the volunteer coordinator and establish any communication protocols. Take careful note of any areas that could be risky or dangerous for your pet (i.e. slippery floors, electric wheelchairs scooting by, trash or clothing bins with infectious items, locked-down wards or restricted areas and hazardous door openings).

Two Days Before

If necessary, bathe your dog two days in advance (to allow dander to settle). Note that any dog visiting a facility where a resident's auto immune system has been compromised **MUST** be bathed. (See: Grooming Your Dog for a Therapy Dog Visit, Toolbox #4)

The Night Before

1. Put a clean sheet or towel on the backseat of your car to keep your dog clean en route to the visit. Or, if you have a smaller dog and use a travel bag, ensure the bedding is fresh.
2. Pack a knapsack and include: a clean towel to wipe your dog's paws when you arrive, hand sanitizer, clean water and a dish for your dog, poop bags and paper towels (just in case) and dog treats (for after the visit).
3. Brush your dog thoroughly. You want your dog to look top-notch. Make sure the dog's nails are clipped and buffed. Carefully clip the fur around the pads with rounded scissors. Clean the dog's ears, around the eyes and the underside of the tail and anus area.

Just Before the Visit

1. Feed and water your dog early, not immediately prior to the visit.
2. Take your dog for a good walk to ensure the animal's bladder and bowel are empty.
3. Brush your dog's teeth (using a canine toothbrush, not human). Give the dog another quick groom.
4. Don't hesitate to call and cancel if you or your dog becomes ill or if you notice any unusual physical or psychological signs or symptoms.
5. Put on your own OTD tag. Then put on your dog's OTD scarf and tag. Remember to wear any other identification required by your facility. Remove any IDs immediately after the visit as they are to be worn only while you and your dog are working.
6. As you enter the building, remember to wipe off your dog's coat and paws if it's wet outside. (Some OTD dogs wear boots to the front door.)

The First Visit

1. Keep it short and successful for you and your dog. Watch for signs of stress.
2. Remember to keep your dog on a short (4-foot) leash to ensure that you are always in control.
3. Don't take any chances; consider safety first.
4. Try to solve any issue that arises as soon as possible with your facility contact and don't hesitate to contact OTD for guidance. A good first visit is a predictor of future success in the workplace. Dogs are creatures of habit so it's best to instill good habits right from the start.
5. Enjoy the smiles your dog brings to the faces of those you meet. Well done!



Prepared by **Julianne Labreche** (OTD Associate Member), **Ann Lambert** and **Michel Bourassa** (OTD Members)

Design donated by www.gummediator.com

Ottawa Therapy Dogs

Suite 750, 1500 Bank St.

Ottawa, Ontario

K1H 1B8

613.261.6834

info@OttawaTherapyDogs.ca



Good dogs doing great work!

ottawatherapydogs.ca