



Velma Pets As Therapy Training School

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Enriching the lives of people and pets through education,
bringing them together safely and beneficially

This document lists issues which may arise for visiting pet handlers.

These issues may also apply when a resident has their own dog at a location
and other residents want to interact with that dog.

It is tempting for staff or the dog owner to take the dog visiting the other residents.

Risks and issues can arise when a pet is encouraged to interact with people by an untrained person.

It is suggested that to avoid risks, the following points be considered.



Suggested - Occupational Health and Safety and Infection Control
For Pets As Therapy Pets and Pet Handlers – 010314

1. All visitors should receive a copy of OH&S and Infection Control policies before attending and be aware of emergency regulations and protocol.
2. If a pet handler is in any way unwell or has the remote possibility of an infection, they must not attend a visit.
3. If a pet is in any way unwell or has the remote possibility of an infection, they must not attend a visit.
4. All pets are to be thoroughly groomed the day of the visit or the day before.
5. All pets are to be fully vaccinated with a C5 vaccination.
6. All pets are to be constantly on a pest infection program to include fleas and all worms.
7. All pets are to be re-assessed for health, temperament and suitability by a professional veterinarian every 12 months.
8. All pet handlers are to ask the following OH&S questions at the start of each visit at a facility BEFORE taking a visit; then arrange the visit to avoid or seek out clients mentioned.
 - Are there any clients or staff here today that may be fearful of pets?
 - Are there any clients or staff here today that may have an allergy to fur?
 - Are there any clients here today who are in isolation or who can't be seen?
 - Are there any clients or staff here today that may intentionally or accidentally scare or harm my pet?
 - Are there any clients here today that may scream or shout at me or my pet, or when my pet is present?
 - Are there any clients here today that have the reflex where they hold onto things (such as fur) and can't let go?
 - Are there any clients, client's visitors or staff here today that may especially benefit from interaction with my pet.
 - Any other issues our visitor should know?
 - Approximately how many clients do you want me to visit today?

9. If the emergency bell should sound during a visit, the pet handler and pet are required to leave the facility immediately to the emergency waiting zone, even if it is only an emergency drill, until the all clear is established.
10. All visitors to health care facilities are required to be accompanied at all times by a person nominated by the customer; unless with written permission by VPAT management or the customer's manager saying otherwise.
11. Pet handlers, or the accompanying person, are to ensure that all clients, client's visitors and staff wipe the hands with an anti-bacterial wipe after they've touched our pet.
12. Pet handlers are to use a target towel or mat, to target medium and large sized pets into position; on furniture and clothing to protect furniture, clothing and skin from fur and scratches.
13. The "shake a paw" trick is banned by VPAT due to the high risk of the client getting scratched.
14. The throwing of anything for a pet to retrieve is banned by VPAT due to the high risk of an accident to a client or the pet.
15. The pet handler takes full responsibility of the pet at all times and must remain 100% in control of the pet 100% of the time. The pet must never be outside the reach of the pet handler.
16. The handler is to place one foot or one arm between the pet and the client at all times during interaction. This procedure diminishes any risk of accidental injury to the pet by the client and to the client by the pet.
17. In the event of any screaming, loud noises or aggressive verbalizations, the pet handler is to remove the pet from that area immediately.
18. If a situation arises where the handler is not able to perform the VPAT OH&S rules, professional procedures and safe pet positioning, the visit is to be abandoned until these can be safely performed by the pet handler.
19. No pet should be pushed or pulled towards a person for forced interaction at any time by the pet handler; a client or member of staff. By keeping the pet safe and happy, the clients are automatically safe and happy.
20. Pets are to remain with the pet handler at all times.
21. Pet handlers are to keep full focus on the pet at all times.
22. Pet handlers can only take one pet per visit.
23. Pet handlers must never attempt to lift any client.

24. In the event that a client requires immediate help, inform the accompanying person or ring the emergency bell.
25. If the pet in any way has discomfort walking but is comfortable sitting or lying down, the pet should remain in a pram or wheel chair throughout the visit.
26. If the pet handler has any discomfort lifting a pet, the pet should be taught to jump up onto the target towel, onto a sturdy chair. If the pet is too small to jump onto a chair, the pet should remain in a pram or wheel chair if the pet is a dog or cat; and a presentation carry container if a rabbit, guinea pig or rat.
27. Any pet handler that might find walking around a health care facility physically uncomfortable should not take the visit.
28. Pet handlers must never attempt to "test" the memory of a client.
29. Pet handlers must not engage in any type of physiotherapy with a client without a written program and supervision from the client's health professional.
30. Pet handlers must not engage in any type of service except 'pets as therapy.'
31. Pet handlers must initially remain outside of the client's personal space (kicking distance) and ask the client if they would like to meet the pet. If the client indicates that they do not want to, then the client's decision must be respected and they should not be encouraged to interact with the pet. However, the clients should be made to feel included in our therapy by asking the client if they want to see some photos or the pet demonstrating tricks.
32. When the client is walking the dog, the pet handler is to use 2 leashes. The client holds onto the end of the long leash and the pet handler holds onto the short leash. The pet handler remains in full control. If the client is unsteady on their feet they should take the arm of a staff person. Pet handlers must not take the arm of a client.
33. If a client is falling, the pet handler should focus on keeping the pet safe and not attempt to save the client. OH&S regulations state no staff person must attempt to save a falling client as they could cause more damage to the client by grabbing them inappropriately.

All pet handlers are to be aware of and adhere to 'Infection Control' procedures:

1. Ask the health and safety question at the start of each visit regarding if there is any transferable disease in the facility. If so, do not commence the 'pets as therapy' visit.
2. Do not enter a health care facility where there has been an outbreak of any contagious disease within 2 weeks of the "all clear."
3. Use the anti-bacterial wipes on the paws and coat in the event that the pet has come into contact with any debris or fluids.
4. Use the target mat or towel on laps or furniture for the pet to stand or sit on.
5. Ensure the hands of all clients, client's visitors and staff are wiped using an anti-bacterial fluid or wipe after each interaction with the pet

By keeping the pet happy and safe, the client is automatically happy and safe!