

# **Therapy Dogs Inc.**

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **2009**

It is a goal of Therapy Dogs Inc. to provide **registration**, support, and insurance for members who are involved in volunteer animal assisted activities. These activities include, but are not limited to, visits to hospitals, special needs centers, schools, and nursing homes. Our objective is to form a network of caring individuals who are willing to share their special animals in order to bring happiness and cheer to people, young and old alike.

Jack and Ann Butrick of Cheyenne, Wyoming, founded Therapy Dogs Inc. in 1990. Since then, it has grown into an organization of more than ten thousand members in the United States and its territories, Canada and Puerto Rico.

Therapy Dogs Inc. tests and registers dog/handler teams. For insurance reasons, we cannot register wolves, wolf-hybrids, coyotes or coyote-hybrids. There is no perfect breed or mix of breeds for therapy work. As long as the dog is more than one year of age, healthy, well mannered, and enjoys human contact, he/she will make a good therapy dog. Knowing tricks is not required, but many members have taught their dogs special tricks such as “shake” and “speak” as a conversation starter. Obedience routines are helpful and serve the same purpose, while conformation dogs are often very good at standing still for petting. Each dog/handler team is unique and offers wonderful opportunities for therapeutic contact.

## **HELPFUL HINTS & TIPS**

1. New applicants should observe a TDInc. handler/dog team during a facility visit before undergoing the TDInc. test. This is an opportunity for the applicant to get an idea of what the facilities are like and to better evaluate if this will be a positive experience for their dog and themselves. You may find it helpful to discuss with T/O which locations you might be best suited for at your team’s level of experience.
2. For your protection, each member must have written proof of the dog’s vaccination readily available at each visit, such as 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 notebook or envelope, all neat, tidy and organized. Staff will appreciate that you clearly have your act together, making you and your dog a welcome volunteer team.
3. Handlers should evaluate their dog’s health and attitude as well as their own, prior to every visit.
4. Avoid using perfumes, colognes and other scented oils on both handler and dog. We do want to look and smell our best when taking our dogs to visit, but it is also very important to remember some individuals may have severe allergies to these products. As a therapy dog team, we are the visitors and must be cognizant of the comfort of those we are there to visit.

5. For health and safety reasons, Therapy Dogs Inc. does not allow the use of cell phones during pet therapy visits and strongly discourages the use of pagers. You cannot focus on your dog and the resident if you are using a cell phone. If you must use a phone, please excuse yourself from your visit and go outside the facility to make your call. We understand that many people are professionally “on call” and are required to use pagers and cell phones. Please set the page or cell phone to vibrate. Use common courtesy as well.
6. While visiting with your dog in a facility, be certain of 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.
7. Always clean up after your dog, inside or outside the facility. Ask where a safe, outside location is where you may walk or rest your dog. Never leave any traces of your dog after a visit.
8. We strongly recommend 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.
9. Do not let your dog precede you down the hall, around a corner, at doorways or doors at stairways. Stand back while waiting for an elevator door to open. When the door opens, wait for a moment to assure safe exit of passengers. If the elevator is occupied, it is polite to ask if you may enter with your dog.
10. **Do not become so comfortable that you become careless.** Stay alert to the surroundings at all times. Excuse yourself and your dog from any situation you do not believe will be a positive experience for all involved. Your dog is your first priority. Never put yourself or your dog in a questionable or threatening situation.
11. Give your verbal commands quietly. Always praise your dog for his/her exemplary behavior.
12. Never leave your dog alone with staff, patients, or visitors.
13. Keep your dog well hydrated. Bring water and bowl. Folding fabric or plastic bowls are perfect for taking along on visits.
14. Although treats are often used during visits, we do not recommend that you allow the patients or residents to give treats to your dog.
15. 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.
16. TDInc. requires that all handlers give other therapy dog teams at least two feet of space between dogs. Do not ever allow your dog to approach a person's lap or bed when another dog is already there. Please take extra precautions in doorways, elevators or any small confined areas.

17. Be alert to signs of stress in your dog and yourself. Monitor the body language of your dog for signs of stress, such as, but not limited to:
  - Excessive panting
  - Dog jumps or climbs on you for security
  - Dog hides behind you
  - Body or legs develop shakes or tremors
  - Ears and tail press close to the body
  - Yawning and facial expression changes
  - Dog looks for an escape route or doorway
  - Dog refuses to socialize
18. Taking a few weeks off may be well deserved and can make a difference in the quality of future visits.
19. 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.
20. Always knock first before entering a patient's room. Ask if they would like a visit from your special dog. Never force a visit on anyone. Never awaken sleeping patients. If the patient is having a meal in the room and wants to visit, excuse yourself and return when they have finished their meal.
21. Only you may pick up your dog. Therapy dogs are not allowed to jump onto any occupied bed, chair or wheelchair unless that resident and a facility staff member have given permission. Injuries could occur if the dog steps on a patient or resident. Ask if the patient or resident has sore areas you should avoid. Remember to watch for tubes, lines, and other medical equipment.
22. Read and obey all warning signs on room doors, such as "ISOLATION" or "INFECTIOUS, DO NOT ENTER." This is important for the patient, your dog and yourself!
23. **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.
24. Always try to hold or guide the exuberant and/or clumsy hand toward your dog for petting and reassurance for both your dog and the person. Always remember to hold the paws so as not to touch the fragile skin of a patient or resident. If your dog gives kisses, remember that not all patients, residents or staff like dog kisses. Always watch for the patient who will grab the ear, tail, or leash. Be ready to protect your dog.
25. **Do not give food, water, or assistance to a patient or resident even if asked.** Notify the nurse that help is needed. TDInc. members will not provide chemical substances, or any substances including but not limited to, hand sanitizers, hand wipes, or lotions, unless provided by the facility. Nor will such substances be applied to the dog's coat.

26. Do have everyone using wheelchairs lock wheels before you bring your dog up to them. You may find it easier to approach someone in a wheelchair from the side.
27. Observe all rules of privacy and confidentiality as required by HIPPA. Never discuss a patient's health or personal issues with the patient or anyone else. Photos may not be taken without prior written permission of the subject (or guardian) and a representative of the facility.
28. A therapy dog team must strictly adhere to 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, along with their own testing procedures required to participate in their program.
29. Know the procedures of identifying and reporting an incident. If an incident or injury to an employee, resident, or visitor in the facility occurs while representing TDInc.:
  - Immediately contact the facility's supervisor on duty.
  - Document the incident on all required forms for the facility.
  - Immediately contact Therapy Dogs Inc. office and report the incident.

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”**  
**Therapy Dogs Inc.**