



Ask Isa

Isa and Deb Helfrich

If you have a question for me, please e-mail it to: admin@therapydogs.org. I can use your name or you can remain anonymous! Looking forward to your questions! —Isa

Dear Isa:

I am a new therapy dog and we're about to go on our first visit. Me and my handler are both a little nervous! Do you have any tips for how we can remember what to do before we go into a patient's room?

—Poopers, Malamute

Dear Poopers:

Excellent question! Read on—maybe this will help. Also, good luck with your visits!

At the Door: A Mental Checklist

It can be tough for new teams to remember everything they need before they enter a room for a visit with a patient or resident. Sometimes it's nerve-racking enough to make new visits when you're just starting out, let alone trying to remember the many policies in place for safe, happy visits.

So, here's a quick checklist for the most important things you should be aware of when you're standing in that doorway about to ask a person if they'd like a visit with your therapy dog.

C – CHECK PRECAUTIONS the patient may have with nurses and staff or look for signs on the door. Are there any isolation, no visitation, caution, or stop or precaution signs anywhere on the door jam, or outside the door near the patient's room? Likewise, is there any other information outside the door about the patient that you may find helpful to your visit (such as if the person is hard of hearing or unable to communicate)? Do this every time, as the status of a patient's health may change between visits. Also, looking for a person's name can make your introduction a bit more personal.

H – Scan at the room for anything potentially **HARMFUL** to you and your dog. Look for unsafe items that your dog may step on or ingest (pills on the floor, cookies on a table, tubes, wires, etc.). Look for space where you could position your dog comfortably (for example, a tight space between a bed and medical divide, with a curtain on your dog's back, may not be to your dog's comfort). Notice room activity.

A – ASK if the person would like a visit. Introduce yourself and your dog. Identity yourselves as a therapy dog team from TDV. Always respect the wishes of someone who doesn't want a visit.

R – As you enter the room, **RECHECK** resident/patient and the room. Look for bandages, wounds, tubes, medical equipment—anything that your dog could interfere with or get tangled in.

T – THANK the person for spending the time with you and your dog.

Before each visit, remember **CHART**: Check Precautions, Harmful?, Ask, Recheck & Thank.

If you ever have any questions related to making safe visits, please do not hesitate to e-mail Deb or Isa at admin@therapydogs.org or Christy and Andy, your member support officers, at membersupport@therapydogs.org.



The “Ask Isa” column appears in the Therapy Dogs of Vermont newsletter—reproduced here for TDV website readers. It is not meant as a substitute for seeking proper veterinary, training, or behavioral advice from professionals!