



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 have a young newly-certified therapy dog and she's great after a few minutes in the facility, but she can be very excitable when we first get in the door. How can we temper that initial enthusiasm so we don't seem like a bomb coming through the door?

—Tippy's mom, Barb

Dear Barb:

Enthusiasm and wanting to visit is a good thing! However, we also want teams to be in control and calm. So, here are some tips for helping an enthusiastic, and/or young therapy dog make a better entrance!

- Take Tippy for a brisk run around the parking lot or facility grounds to get out that energy from the car ride and arriving at the facility. I like to play Frisbee before I work, so we play some disc in the grassy area in front of the nursing home (we made sure to ask permission to do this off leash—and the residents like to watch me catch the disc from the windows!).
- Start using some simple habits/behaviors to get Tippy into work mode before you go into the facility. For example, put on your TDV bandanna and do five minutes of obedience exercises; use a training cue like “working now”.

- If you are working with other therapy dog teams, always meet them outside the facility to get greeting out of the way and go into work mode.
- Use Tippy's desire to meet people as a reward and training tool—so instead of letting her burst in the door, if there's someone wanting to greet her, ask her to be in control (a sit is excellent). Then when she is in quiet control, let her meet (this is her reward).
- Use a command for eye contact (look or watch me) to get her focused on you for a calm entry.
- Use a command like sit or heel to tell Tippy what to do with her energy when she's all excited to start working!

Hope this helps! Safe and happy visiting to you both!



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!

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