

Useful Commands for TD Work

—Isa Helfrich, German Shepherd & therapy dog (typed by Deb Helfrich, Vice President)

By far, my most favorite all-time command is "feast." Whenever someone says that word, it means that I get to eat—all by myself, no sharing—ANY tasty human food item within my reach—even if it's in the garbage, on someone's plate, or on the table. Oh wait, sorry, this is my Ask Isa column, not a piece of fantasy fiction.

Okay, okay, so there is no such thing as a *feast* command, though I wouldn't mind that one at all. But seriously, here are some of my all time favorite commands for making visits fun and safe.

LEAVE IT: Do not touch, pick up, or sniff a particular object that I may have noticed. This is great for helping me remember not to eat something that may be bad for me, like a pill or tissue on the floor. Unfortunately, it also means I can't touch that chicken sandwich someone left on a coffee table.

PAWS UP: I place my two front paws up on an object or surface—gently and one at a time—where my handler points. This is helpful for gently putting my paws on the side of a bed or a chair so a patient can easily pat me. Variation: Since I am still learning to be gentle and precise when I do the "paws up," I do it on my handler's arm—so I am "perched" like a bird (see photo)—then I can be positioned onto a bed from the arm or stay there where someone can pat me. I guess you could call this version "perch" but your pooch may say "that command is for the birds!"



The "Paws Up"

TOUCH: My handler says this when she wants me to sniff an object she touches. This has been really helpful to me when there's an object that may frighten me at first. When my handler says "touch" I know that it's safe for me to investigate.



The "Fuss"

FUSS: This is a supercharged heel (word comes from the German command to heel). When my owner says "fuss," that means I have to heel very close to my handler's leg and pay very close attention by watching her face. ("fuss" is different from what my handler calls "heel" and some others call "by me." For me, "heel" means to walk nicely by my handler's leg with a loose leash, but I don't have to be watching my handler or be tucked close to the leg.) This is helpful when I have to walk through an area with tight space, lots of distraction, or that may not be safe to stop and linger.

BEI FUSS: To me, this means, "get into heel position fast" (another German-based command). When my handler says this, I snap quickly into heel position, sit and wait for my next command. This helps get me close to my handler and at attention quickly—useful if there's a danger nearby or my handler needs my complete attention right away.

SNORKLE: When my handler wants me to rest my head on a bed or by a person's hand, so that they can easily touch me, "put your snorkel here" is the phrase, and I put my head where my handler points. For those curious about the word origin, it came from our founder, Steve Reiman, who used to call his Sheps' noses "snorkels." It's fun to say, isn't it?

Ask Isa...