



CONDUCTING A PETS AS THERAPY VISIT [10] THE WELFARE OF YOUR PAT DOG OR CAT

Possible Risks to Welfare arise from:

- ❖ **The environment** - for example, excessive heat, noise or activity; dropped medication; slippery floors etc.
- ❖ **The people** - for example, unpredictable or aggressive behaviours from clients
- ❖ **The tasks that the animal is asked to do** - for example, repeated interactions with lots of people; being held or restrained

Minimising Risk

- ❖ Ensure your PAT dog or PAT cat only visits when they are happy & healthy
- ❖ Ask the establishment to explain any particular risks from their patients or clients, what to look out for and how to respond safely
- ❖ If you are in doubt, make sure a staff member accompanies you on your visits
- ❖ If you are not happy with an interaction, politely and calmly withdraw your animal from the visit

Understanding your dog or cat's behaviour - signs of stress

- ❖ Even a routine, well-planned Pets As Therapy visit can cause your pet mild levels of stress, especially if they are new to visiting
- ❖ Individual animals respond to and cope with stressful situations differently
- ❖ However, repeatedly putting any animal in a stressful situation or exposing them to excessive levels of stress is unkind and potentially unsafe as an animal's behaviour becomes less predictable when it is under stress
- ❖ Chronic stress leads to ill-health and therapy animal "burn-out"
- ❖ There are some simple signs to watch out for that may suggest that your animal is becoming stressed

Signs of stress in cats and dogs

- ❖ Obvious signs such as reluctance to go on visits
- ❖ More subtle signs on visits, such as yawning, head turning and lip licking
- ❖ Behavioural signs of withdrawal such as pulling away or sitting or lying down in an attempt to avoid an interaction. Other animals may show signs of irritability or aggression when stressed
- ❖ Any change in behaviour that is not "normal" for **your** animal
- ❖ Health may suffer if an animal is under chronic stress - for example, increased gastro-intestinal disturbances and minor skin complaints