



Petiquette of Visiting

We all joined the Fairfax Pets On Wheels program for the same reason – a commitment to brighten the days of our senior citizens, to make them feel less lonely through compassion and to provide them with the companionship of a well-behaved pet.

As the owners of the pets, we are also faced with certain responsibilities, making sure a safe and pleasant visit is provided. As we all know, residents are often frail and their health conditions not always optimal. Therefore, great caution has to be given to make sure that the people we visit are never in harm's way.

For example, you are the proud owner of a very happy dog and every time he sees you, he's so happy that he jumps all over you. "How cute!" you may think – NOT SO. Such behavior could put our residents in great danger of being seriously hurt. Don't forget – most residents use wheelchairs and don't have the ability to quickly turn away at the sight of a happily bouncing behemoth of a dog! Below are some of the do's and don'ts of pet visitations – a helpful tool for all our new volunteers and a little reminder for all our veteran FPOW volunteers.

So, here are some important things to remember:

Prong Collars and Choke Chains: Their use in and around the facilities is NOT permitted. It is very dangerous for an elderly person who may get caught or pinched.

A safe alternative is the use of a so-called "Gentle Leader" (aka "Halti") or a simple collar combined with a no-pull harness such as the "Easy Walk Harness." Martingale collars without chain attachments are also allowed. (Check out Weber's Pet Supermarket in Fairfax and Herndon – they have an abundance of color and pattern choices that are quite affordable.

Leash: Never use a retractable/flexi lead during a visit. Not even once. Keep a visiting leash in your car. That way you will always have one handy. This rule also applies to any event that is held by or for Fairfax Pets on Wheels, whether it's promotional or recreational.

As an alternative, we recommend the use of a 2' to 6' leather, cotton or nylon leash, depending on the size of the canine. The taller the dog, the shorter the leash should be. Also, a harness that applies any kind of leverage to the dog (for example: the "Sporn Harness") is not permitted.

Never let your dog off leash or be out of control while visiting a facility. Control your pet at all times. In a safe area where there are no residents present, fellow FPOW pets are allowed to say "hi" to each other in a civilized manner.

Pet Strollers: If you plan to use a stroller to transport your pet, you need to bring it to the temperament test. When you have your on-site orientation at the facility you selected, the Facility Liaison will work with you to ensure that the stroller works within the facility.

Handler: Only the person who handles the dog during the temperament testing is allowed to handle the pet during visits. You, the handler, are responsible for your pet's actions and reactions. We love to see our young volunteers come along for visits with their parents. However, make sure that they do not handle the pet during the visit. Once they turn 18 years of age, we will be more than happy to see them at one of our temperament testing events to be authorized to handle their dog.

Grooming: Nails have to be short and smooth. It's best not to cut your pet's nails on a visiting day because they will still be rough. After cutting, use a file or a sandpaper Dremel tool to smooth them. The skin of an older person is often paper thin and can be easily injured. Also, do not show up for a visit with an ungroomed pet. It does not present an appealing picture if your pet has odor or if it is matted or full of "debris" from your yard.

Other Pets at the Facility: Occasionally, a facility may have its own resident pet or a resident's family member may bring a pet to the facility. **Do not let your pet interact with any other pet at the facility that is not part of the Fairfax Pets on Wheels program.**

Ethics: It's important to remain ethical and never share any confidential information a resident may share with you. You may share information with staff if it is necessary and beneficial to the resident. Always be respectful of the person you are visiting. Always be aware of the policies of the facility you are visiting.

Non-dog Visitors: Cats and bunnies have to be carried in baskets or placed on a towel. They also should wear harnesses or collars.

Training: A little training goes a long way! Make sure your dog has at least the basic level of training to help make him/her more controllable and reliable during your visits. Always be aware of your pet's stress level/tolerance.

Fairfax Pets on Wheels is a growing organization and the way each and every one of us conducts their visits reflects upon it. Should you be uncertain about the way to handle a situation, please do not hesitate to ask your Facility Liaison or Alternate Liaison for advice. They will be able to help you and/or refer you to someone who can provide the answers to all your questions regarding the program. Another option is to call FPOW at 703-324-5424.

