

Service, Emotional Support and Therapy Animals

Fact Sheet by ServiceDogFacts.com

Please refer to our website for complete information and links to government sources.

Service Animals

A service animal performs tasks to assist a person with a disability, and the person generally has the right to be accompanied by their service animal anywhere the general public is allowed.

Species of Service Animals

- Only dogs and miniature horses can serve as service animals. Miniature horses make excellent guide horses and offer the advantage of having longer lifespans than dogs.

Types of Service Animals

- Service animals are also known as assistance animals or by names associated with their tasks, e.g., guide dog, hearing dog, mobility dog, medical alert dog, and psychiatric service dog.
- Even a psychiatric service animal must perform a task, such as moving in to stand as a barrier between a person suffering from PTSD and anyone who approaches.
- A person taking a so-called "comfort dog" into a supermarket because they don't want to leave it in their car is committing service animal fraud. And putting it in their shopping cart where food goes is both unsanitary and inconsiderate to others, and the business may ask them to remove it from the shopping cart.

Training, Certification, Registration, Documentation, ID Cards and Vests

- A person may train their service animal themselves, though many service animal organizations do wonderful work.
- Service animals do not need to be certified or registered; they only need to perform a task.
- No form of documentation is required, including ID cards and vests.
- ID cards and vests are sometimes used with legitimate service animals because the public is more accepting of something looking official; they are also used to commit service animal fraud.

Where You Can Take Your Service Animal

- **Businesses:** A person with a disability generally has the right to take their service animal into businesses, just as they would be allowed to take a cane or wheelchair.

However, a business may ask that the animal be removed from the premises if it is eliminating indoors, out of control (e.g., barking in a movie theater or begging food from patrons in a restaurant), or posing a threat to the health or safety of others.

A business may only ask a person if their animal is a service animal required because of a disability, and what task it has been trained to perform. They may not ask the person about their disability, or ask that the animal demonstrate its task.

- **Hotels, Motels and Camps:** Hotels, motels and camps are treated as businesses. They may not charge a deposit or surcharge for a service animal even if such charges are routinely charged for pets, though they may charge for damages.
- **Housing with Pet Restrictions:** A person may keep a service animal in housing with a "no pets" policy, or size or weight restrictions, though housing providers are only required to make reasonable accommodations.
- **Airplanes:** A service dog may travel with its owner on an airplane.

Emotional Support Animals

An emotional support animal (ESA) provides therapeutic support to a person with a mental health disability, and may be kept in housing with pet restrictions and travel with their owner on airplanes.

Species of Emotional Support Animals

- There are no restrictions on species other than that a housing provider is only required to make reasonable accommodations, and what is practical on an airplane.

Training, Certification, Registration, Documentation, ID Cards and Vests

- Emotional support animals are often referred to as therapy animals, companion animals, or comfort animals by both the public and health professionals.
- Emotional support animals are basically household pets, and as such require no special training, certification or registration, nor are they required to have ID cards or wear vests.
- While most animals provide love and emotional support, the designation of emotional support animal is only applicable to animals which have been prescribed by a licensed mental health professional.

Where You Can Take Your Emotional Support Animal

- **Businesses:** The owner of an emotional support animal has no special rights to be accompanied by their emotional support animal anywhere that animals are not generally allowed, except where individual states grant this right.
- **Hotels, Motels and Camps:** Hotels, motels and camps are treated as businesses, and emotional support animals are treated as pets.
- **Housing with Pet Restrictions:** A person may keep an emotional support animal in housing with a "no pets" policy, or size or weight restrictions, though housing providers are only required to make reasonable accommodations.
- **Airplanes:** When practical, an emotional support animal may travel with its owner on an airplane.

Therapy Animals

A therapy animal provides therapeutic support to people other than its handler. Therapy animal teams visit schools, libraries, businesses, assisted living homes, dental offices, hospitals and hospices, though a therapy animal handler has no special rights to be accompanied by their therapy animal anywhere that animals are not generally allowed.

Species of Therapy Animals

- While many therapy dog organizations only accept dogs, other organizations and many facilities accept any number of species.

Training, Certification, Registration, Documentation, ID Cards and Vests

- Therapy animals do not require any special training. They only have to know basic obedience and be well-behaved, and be well-socialized and enjoy visiting with people.
- Certification or registration with a therapy animal organization, and the insurance the organization provides, will likely be a requirement of any facility you visit.
- The need for documentation and identification will be determined by the therapy animal organization you work with, and the facilities you visit.

Where You Can Take Your Therapy Animal

- A therapy animal handler has no special rights to be accompanied by their therapy animal anywhere that animals are not generally allowed. Businesses, including hotels, motels, camps, apartments, condominiums and airlines, may and usually do treat therapy animals as pets.