



What's the difference between a Service Animal and an Emotional-Support Animal?

Service animals must be dogs (in some cases, miniature horses). They are individually trained to do specific tasks to mitigate a person's disability – they have public access rights as an accommodation for the person's disability.

Emotional-support animals (ESAs) provide comfort or emotional support to their person just by being present. Because they are not trained to perform work or do specific tasks to mitigate the person's disability they are not considered service animals and do not have public access rights. However, the Fair Housing Act and Air Carrier Access Act provide provisions for people with disabilities and their ESAs. We have not been able to find a citation that clearly identifies the type of species that can be considered ESAs, but generally most domesticated animals (dogs, cats, some birds, etc.) may be considered ESAs.

It is important to know that terms are often interchanged with one another by various entities, organizations, media, and the public. Additionally, ESAs often are referred to as Therapy Animals. Therapy Animals can also mean 'volunteer with your pet' – in which people take their pets to bring joy and comfort to others. When someone inquires about getting an animal to be their Service, ESA, or Therapy animal it is helpful to first ask what they mean.

Per the U.S. Department of Justice:

“Service animals are defined as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Examples of such work or tasks include guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack, or performing other duties. Service animals are working animals, not pets. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person's disability. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.

This definition does not affect or limit the broader definition of “assistance animal” under the Fair Housing Act or the broader definition of “service animal” under the Air Carrier Access Act.”

“Generally, title II and title III entities must permit service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas where members of the public are allowed to go.” *(This does NOT apply to emotional-support or therapy animals.)*

Before recommending a Service or Emotional-Support dog – things to consider.

Following are some things to consider before recommending a person acquire a Service or ESA dog to assist them with their disability. While ESAs may be species other than dogs, this document focuses on dogs as that is our organization's area of expertise.

- Understand if the person needs an ESA or needs a dog that can be trained to qualify as a Service Dog per ADA requirements, with full public access rights.
 - BEFORE getting a dog to train to be a Service Dog (with public access rights), it is strongly recommended that the person contacts a professional Service Dog training organization, such as Handi-Dogs, to get guidance on what traits and breeds to look for. The last thing anyone wants is for a person to acquire a dog with a specific goal in mind, become attached, and then find out it is not a suitable match for their needs.
 - Often we get calls from someone who just adopted a small dog to train to be their Service Dog to help them with their mobility and/or psychological disability. Unfortunately, the tasks trained for service work to assist people with mobility and/or psychological disabilities typically require a medium to larger size dog.
 - Additionally, not all dogs have the right temperament and confidence to become Service Dogs that can handle working in public areas with all the different sites, sounds, crowds, etc.
- Has the person ever owned / taken care of a dog before? If so, for how long.
 - Many people don't realize that dogs need daily care – food, fresh water, be taken outside, etc.
 - If the person has had a dog(s) for a short period of time – not the full length of the dog's life, why? Did they have trouble paying for its care? Did they have trouble caring for it, or got too overwhelmed by life circumstances so they gave it up? Did other family members (who they still live with) not like having a dog so they got rid of it? Have situations changed?
- Can the person afford to take care of the dog for its lifetime? Many experts will say it costs anywhere from \$500 - \$3,000 a year to properly care for a dog (more as the dog ages and needs more medical care).
 - The costs below are NOT covered by insurance or any organizations we know of – for service dog owners, they may be tax deductible under medical expenses.
 - Feed quality pet food
 - Not all dog food is created equal. Some pets may be allergic to some preservatives in some brands or have food allergies that result in on-going skin issues or ear infections for instance – which then require on-going medical care until the situation is resolved.
 - Purchase / get dog leashes, collars, harnesses, bowls, toys, dog beds/mats, etc.
 - Regular grooming: Nails clipped, bathed, ears cleaned, fur cut, teeth brushed/cleaned
 - Annual licensing in Pima County (misdemeanor if not done)
 - Veterinarian care:
 - annual checkups
 - Vaccinations (the law requires all dogs be current on rabies vaccinations in AZ)
 - spay/neuter
 - what if the dog gets sick

- Is the person able to exercise the dog daily – take on appropriate length walks, room to run and play?
 - Must be on a leash when outside, unless in a fenced yard or fenced ‘no-leash’ dog play area.
- Does the person have access to transportation to take the dog to groomers and veterinarians?
- Does the person have a support system to help them with their dog’s care and training?
 - If the person becomes incapacitated (one day or months), who will take care of their dog?
- Does the person have the physical and psychological capabilities and abilities to train their dog?
 - All dogs (service and emotional-support) must be well-mannered (housebroken, if the dog barks it should be able to be controlled quickly, etc.)
 - For public access rights, dogs must also be trained to do specific tasks to mitigate the person’s disability.
 - Per the ADA, just the mere presence of the dog to comfort, reduce anxiety or blood pressure does NOT qualify as a service animal and thus no public access rights.
 - For Service Dog training at Handi-Dogs:
 - Ability to attend weekly training sessions for 12 – 18 months on average.
 - Do daily training on their own – 5 to 15 minutes each day.
 - Have transportation to / from weekly training sessions.
 - Have the financial resources to pay for training.
 - Handi-Dogs standard subsidized service dog training fees averages \$1,000 - \$1,600 over 12 – 18 months; financial assistance plans provide up to a 75% discount (equating to \$250 - \$400 paid over 12 – 18 months) for those at or below the 150% federal poverty level.
 - Purchase ‘high-value’ treats for training.
 - If a person could benefit from a Service Dog with public access rights, but is not able to be a significant part of the dog’s training (such as how our program is structured at Handi-Dogs), we recommend looking for a ‘pre-trained’ dog. Reputable organizations can be found on the Assistance Dogs International website. Please note that application processes for most organizations are lengthy and is not unusual for those approved to have to wait 1- 2 or more years to be partnered with a trained service dog.
- When a person first gets a dog to train to be their Service Dog, Handi-Dogs often does NOT recommend that the dog be taken everywhere with them. This could have a negative impact on long-term training.
 - Will the person initially be able to leave their dog at their home unattended?
 - Will the person be able to psychologically let the dog be alone for periods of time and not worry that it is lonely or will have separation anxiety?
- Even though Service Dogs are allowed public access, it is not uncommon for Service Dog handlers to periodically be told they can’t bring their dog inside. Will the person be able to appropriately handle these types of ‘confrontations’?
- In AZ, Service Dogs in-training are allowed public access. However, in other states this is not the case. Does the person travel out of state frequently?