

Service Dogs, Emotional Support Dogs and Therapy Dogs Fact Sheet by TherapyDogInfo.net

Please refer to TherapyDogInfo.net for complete information including links to sources.

Service Dogs

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

Types of Service Dogs

- Service dogs are also known as assistance dogs 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 dog 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 dog fraud, and putting it in their shopping cart where food goes is both unsanitary and inconsiderate to others.

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

- A person may train their service dog themselves, though many service dog organizations do wonderful work.
- Service dogs 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 dogs because the public is more accepting of something looking official; they are also used to commit service dog fraud.

Where You Can Take Your Service Dog

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

A business may ask that the dog be removed if it is out of control, e.g., barking in a movie theater or begging food from patrons in a restaurant, or it poses a threat to the health or safety of others.

A business may only ask a person if their dog is a service dog required because of a disability, and what task it has been trained to perform. They may not ask the person about their disability, nor ask that the dog 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 dog even if such charges are routinely charged for pets.
- **Housing with Pet Restrictions:** A person may keep a service dog 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. Google the name of your airline and "service dog" for details.

Service Dogs, Emotional Support Dogs and Therapy Dogs

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Emotional Support Dogs

An emotional support dog (ESD) 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.

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

- Emotional support dogs are often referred to as therapy dogs, companion dogs, or comfort dogs by both the public and health professionals.
- Emotional support dogs 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 all dogs provide love and emotional support, the designation of emotional support dog is only applicable to dogs which have been prescribed by a licensed mental health professional.

The mental health professional must document the need for their client to have an emotional support dog, which is typically done in the form of a letter.

Where You Can Take Your Emotional Support Dog

- **Businesses:** The owner of an emotional support dog has no special rights to be accompanied by their emotional support dog anywhere that dogs 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 dogs are treated as pets.
- **Housing with Pet Restrictions:** A person may keep an emotional support dog in housing with a "no pets" policy or size or weight restrictions, though housing providers are only required to make reasonable accommodations.
- **Airplanes:** An emotional support dog may travel with its owner on an airplane. Google the name of your airline and "service dog" for details.

Therapy Dogs

A therapy dog provides therapeutic support to people other than its handler. Therapy dogs are frequently invited to visit schools, libraries, assisted living homes, hospitals and hospices, though a therapy dog handler has no special rights to be accompanied by their therapy dog anywhere that dogs are not generally allowed.

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

- Therapy dogs do not require any special training. They only have to know basic obedience and be well-behaved.
- Certification or registration with a therapy dog 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 dog organization you work with, and the facilities you visit.

Where You Can Take Your Therapy Dog

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