



Frequently Asked Questions About Service Animals

1. What is a service animal?

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a service animal is defined as **a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability**. A service animal is not a pet.

The task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person's disability. Examples of such tasks include, but are not limited to:

- 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, and/or performing other similar duties.

2. What does “do work or perform tasks” mean?

The dog must be trained to take a specific action when needed to assist the person with a disability. For example, a person with diabetes may have a dog that is trained to alert him when his blood sugar reaches high or low levels. A person with depression may have a dog that is trained to remind her to take her medication. Or, a person who has epilepsy may have a dog that is trained to detect the onset of a seizure and help the person remain safe during the seizure.

3. Does the ADA require service animals to be professionally trained?

No. People with disabilities have the right to train the dog themselves and are not required to use a professional service dog training program.

4. Are service animals in training considered service animals under the ADA?

Under the ADA, the dog must already be trained before it can be taken into public places. However, some local laws may also cover animals that are still in training.

5. Would a comfort animal, emotional support animal, or therapy dog be considered a service animal?

No. Emotional support animals, comfort animals, and therapy dogs are not service animals under Title II and Title III of the ADA. The tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to an individual's disability. A doctor's letter does not turn an animal into a service animal. While comfort animals are often used as part of a medical treatment plan, they are not considered service animals under the ADA. They do not have special training to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities, and they are not limited to working with people with disabilities. Therefore, comfort animals are not covered by federal laws protecting

the use of service animals.

6. Do service animals have to wear a vest or patch or special harness identifying them as service animals?

No. The ADA does not require service animals to wear a vest, identification tag, or specific harness. Additionally, covered entities may not require documentation, such as proof that the animal has been certified, trained, or licensed as a service animal, as a condition for entry.

7. Who is responsible for the care and supervision of a service animal?

The handler is responsible for caring for and supervising the service animal, which includes toileting, feeding, grooming and veterinary care. Covered entities are not obligated to supervise or otherwise care for a service animal. Individuals who have service animals are not exempt from local animal control or public health requirements (like rabies vaccinations).

8. Can a service animal accompany people with disabilities in every public space?

Generally, yes. Local governments, businesses and nonprofit organizations that serve the public generally must allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas of the facility where the public is normally allowed to go.

9. Are service animals allowed in food establishments?

Service animals are allowed in public areas and are also allowed in non-public areas to accommodate food employees with disabilities. Businesses that sell or prepare food must allow service animals in public areas even if state or local health codes prohibit animals on the premises.

10. Can people bring more than one service animal into a public place?

Generally, yes. Some people with disabilities may use more than one service animal to perform different tasks.

For example, a person who has a visual disability and a seizure disorder may use one service animal to assist with way-finding, and another that is trained as a seizure alert dog. Other people may need two service animals for the same task, such as a person who needs two dogs to assist him or her with stability when walking. If both dogs can be accommodated, both should be allowed in.

However, in some circumstances, it may not be possible to accommodate more than one service animal. For example, in a crowded small restaurant, only one dog may be able to fit under the table. The only other place for the second dog would be in the aisle, which would block space between tables. In this case, staff may request that one of the dogs be left outside.

11. If my city/county requires all dogs to be registered and licensed, does this apply to my service animal?

Yes. Service animals are subject to local dog licensing and registration requirements.

12. Can service animals be any breed of dog?

Yes. The ADA does not restrict the type of dog breeds that can be service animals.

13. When can service animals be excluded?

The ADA does not require covered entities to modify policies, practices, or procedures if it would “fundamentally alter” the nature of the goods, services, programs, or activities provided to the public. Nor does it overrule legitimate safety requirements. If admitting service animals would fundamentally alter the nature of a service or program, service animals may be prohibited. In addition, if a service animal is out of control and the handler does not take effective action to control it, or if it is not housebroken, that animal may be excluded.

14. What does “under control” mean? Do service animals have to be on a leash? Do they have to be quiet and not bark?

The ADA requires service animals be under the control of the handler at all times. In most instances, the handler will be the individual with a disability or a third party who accompanies the individual with a disability.

The service animal must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered while in public places unless these devices interfere with the service animal’s work or the person’s disability prevents use of these devices.

For example, a person who uses a wheelchair may use a long, retractable leash to allow her service animal to pick up or retrieve items. The leash must prevent the dog from wandering away from its handler, and allow the handler to control the dog, even if it is retrieving an item at a distance. Or, a returning veteran who has PTSD and has great difficulty entering unfamiliar spaces may have a dog that is trained to enter a space, check to see that no threats are there, and come back and signal that it is safe to enter. The dog must be off-leash to do its job, but may be leashed at other times.

If the animal appears to be a direct threat (exhibiting threatening behavior) to the handler or others, then it is not under the handler’s control. At that point, the handler could be asked to get the animal under control. Failure to comply may result in a follow-up request to remove the animal from the premises.

15. What can my staff do if a service animal is being disruptive?

If a service animal is out of control and the handler does not take effective action to control it, your staff may request that the animal be removed from the premises.

16. Can allergies or fear of dogs provide a valid reason to refuse service to a person who uses a service animal?

No. Allergies and fear of dogs are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people using service animals. When a person who is allergic to dog dander and a person who uses a service animal must spend time in the same room or facility, the business must attempt to accommodate both individuals by assigning them to different areas in the facility or different locations within the same room.

17. Are stores required to allow service animals to be placed in a shopping cart?

Generally, the dog must stay on the floor, or the person must carry the dog.

For example, if a person with diabetes has a glucose alert dog, they may carry the dog in a chest pack, so the animal can be close to the person's face, to allow the dog to smell his breath to alert him of a change in glucose levels

18. Is a miniature horse also considered a service animal?

The ADA has a separate provision regarding miniature horses. Entities covered by the ADA must modify their policies to permit miniature horses where reasonable. Miniature horses generally range in height from 24 inches to 34 inches measured to the shoulders, and generally weigh between 70 and 100 pounds.

The ADA regulations set out four assessment factors to assist entities in determining whether miniature horses can be accommodated in their facilities. The assessment factors are (1) whether the miniature horse is housebroken; (2) whether the miniature horse is under the owner's control; (3) whether the facility can accommodate the miniature horse's type, size, and weight; and (4) whether the miniature horse's presence will not compromise legitimate safety requirements necessary for safe operation of the facility.

For further questions related to the Americans with Disabilities Act, please visit www.ada.gov.