



What Is a Service Animal?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a law that protects a person from being treated unfairly just because they have a disability. The ADA says a person has a disability if their body or brain works differently than most people, so it is harder or impossible for them to do things like hear, see, speak, think, walk, or breathe. A service animal is an animal trained to help a person with a disability do something that is hard for them to do. The ADA says a service animal is any dog or miniature horse that is trained to do work or tasks for a person with a disability. Service animals are working animals, NOT pets.

What Is a Service Animal's Work or Task?

A service animal needs to do a task for the person with a disability that it helps. The task must be something you can watch the animal do. The person the service animal helps is called its handler. The handler needs to have a disability, but the disability does not have to be one that you can see. The animal's task can be things like guiding a handler who is blind, pawing at a handler who is deaf when the animal hears a baby cry, or picking items up off the floor and giving them to the handler. The task can also be things like sitting close when the handler has a seizure or licking the hand of a handler with anxiety to calm them. An animal that makes a person feel better but does not do a task is not a service animal under the ADA.

Where Can a Service Animal Go?

If the handler needs help from their service animal, the ADA says that the animal must be allowed to help their handler and go everywhere the handler goes.

Often, businesses and government buildings say that no "pets" are allowed. But the business or government building must allow a handler with their service animal because a service animal is not a pet. The handler must be able to get the items and services when they are with their service animal.

Does a Service Animal Have to Behave?

The handler must care for their service animal all the time. The handler must stop the service animal from running around, take it outside to use the bathroom, and make sure the animal behaves well. This means, the service animal should not bark, growl at, or bite other animals or people. If a service animal does not behave, the business or government agency can ask the handler to take the animal out of the building. The handler can come back later without their animal.

How Do I Know If an Animal Is a “Service Animal”?

A service animal must be a dog or miniature horse. If the handler does not have a disability others can see, people who work at a business or government agency can ask two questions:

1. Is this a service animal needed because of a disability?
2. What task has the animal been trained to perform?

People who work at a businesses or government agency should not ask:

- Anything about the handler’s disability.
- To see the service animal do its task(s).
- For papers that say an animal is a service animal.

The federal government has not approved any type of form, application, vest, or picture ID to show an animal is a service animal. People with animals often buy papers from the internet that say their animal is a service animal, but these papers don’t prove anything or mean anything.

Important Things to Know About Service Animals

Service animals are working animals, NOT pets. Do not pet, feed, or bother a service animal. It could cause problems with the dog’s training or be dangerous for the handler.

Businesses and government agencies cannot charge a deposit or extra money for a service animal, even if they must clean up animal hair. But if a service animal destroys or really damages something, like a piece of furniture in a hotel room, the handler must pay for that damage.

Service animals that behave well can go everywhere their handlers go, even if another person at that place has allergies to dogs or is afraid of dogs.

Service animals can be any breed of dog and any size, big or small.

Businesses or government agencies do not have to care for or watch a service animal. The handler must care for and control the service animal.

Who Can I Ask if I Have Questions About Service Animals or Want More Information About the ADA?

The Pacific ADA Center answers questions and provides information about the ADA. Call 800-949-4232 or send an email to adatech@adapacific.org. You can also look at the Pacific ADA Center website at <https://www.adapacific.org>.

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