



## Service Dog Etiquette

Adapted from International Association of Canine Professionals and the Guide Dog Foundation



### Proper Behavior Around a Service Dog or Service Dog in Training

Speak to the handler, not the dog or to someone accompanying the handler. Do not separate the dog from its owner for any reason.

Do not interact with the dog in any way. The dog's job is to focus on completing tasks for its owner or handler. Your behavior should not interfere with this focus. The handler is trying to complete his/her own activity. Please don't touch, talk, feed or otherwise distract the dog while the dog is working and/or wearing its harness or vest. You should allow the dog to concentrate and perform for the safety of his handler - do not give the dog commands.

Always ask permission to interact with any dog, including a service dog. If you see a "please pet" patch on the harness or vest, that means that the handler is open to interacting with you and sharing more about the dog, which may be part of the dog's job - helping the handler interact with people.

Don't treat the dog as a pet; give him/her the respect of a working dog. Respect the handler and dog team - don't try to take control in situations unfamiliar to the dog or handler, but please assist the handler upon their request or ask if there is anything you can do to help. If a service dog is without its handler, the dog may be seeking help for its handler - please follow the dog to see if there is a need for help. If the handler is down, do not call 9-1-1 - ask if the handler needs assistance.

Even if the handler is out to dinner, the handler is not there to entertain you or to answer your questions.

### **Examples of poor etiquette that should not happen when one sees a service dog are:**

Talking, whistling, cooing, or barking at the dog .

If the handler says no when you ask to pet the dog, don't be offended - you wouldn't ask to pet their wheelchair or get mad if they wouldn't let you pet their cane.

Asking the dog to do tricks for you.

Praising the dog when it completes its task.

Clapping your leg or clapping your hands.

Allowing your children to approach.

Speaking to the handler ways such as:

"I have a friend that fosters service dogs."

"What is wrong with you?"

"What a good dog you have!"

"What happened?"

"What is his/her name?"

"Do you take it to the hospital to cheer people?"

"I know you are not supposed to pet, but I just can't resist!"

Asking for a demonstration.

### **Another Thing to Consider:**

No one likes to have people stare, point, or hear personal comments from strangers. Health is a private issue. In addition, making comments to others about the handler and its dog is hurtful for the handler to hear, directly or indirectly.

*Please be aware of your actions and the effects these actions may have on others.  
The best way to help the handler and the service dog is to respect their space and right to privacy.*

# Top 5 Service Dog Myths

## Myth #1 Service Dogs are only for people who are blind or in wheelchairs

Service dogs can be trained to assist people with many other types of disabilities. Some disabilities are not visible such as medical and psychiatric conditions. It is impossible to recognize every type of disability that could be helped by a specially trained service dog. Some examples of invisible disabilities include but are not limited to Diabetes, Hearing Impairment, Epilepsy, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

## Myth #2 Service Dogs must wear a special vest and have special identification

Most (but not all) service dogs will have a working vest, harness, or other identifying equipment as a courtesy to let the public know that the dog is working and should not be disturbed. Since it is not required by U.S. law, the absence of a working vest or identification is not illegal.

## Myth #3 Its ok to pet Service Dogs if they aren't working

Service dogs should never be disturbed even if they appear to not be working. Many jobs require the dog to monitor the environment or remain focused on their handler. Petting, calling the dog, or offering attention could put the handler at risk if the dog is distracted from its job. If in doubt, it is always courteous to ask permission before petting any dog.

## Myth #4 You can always tell a “fake Service Dog” by how it looks and acts

It is a sad fact that there are a few people who will deceptively take their pet dog into public posing it as a trained service animal however, it is less common. The unfortunate truth is that many individuals with legitimate disabilities and service dogs have been wrongly accused and treated poorly. As individuals with disabilities struggle every day to be accepted into their communities, being accused of such deception only adds to those challenges. Remember that not all disabilities are visible, and many individuals benefit from the help of trained service dogs.

**A service dog can be of any breed or size.** Small service dogs can be used to detect allergens in the environment, alert to sounds, or provide psychiatric assistance. Extremely large breed dogs can be used to assist a person with balance and mobility support. Local laws that prohibit certain breed dogs in its jurisdiction do not apply to service dogs because they are not pets.

**All service dogs should be well mannered, under control, and housebroken** however, not all service dogs will maintain a precise position at the side of the handler. At first glance, some service dogs may appear to be ill-mannered or lacking proper obedience training. This common misperception stems from the public's more familiarity with guide dogs for the blind who maintain a specified position in order to help the handler navigate around obstacles with the use of a special handle. Other types of service dog jobs such as detecting, alerting, interrupting behavior, retrieving, and assisting with various duties may require the dog to freely move about as they monitor the environment or respond to their handler. Some service dogs may be on a very long leash or no leash at all. The law permits alternative control methods such as voice or hand signals if the dog's job or the person's disability prevent the use of a leash.

**Service dogs are not perfect.** Just like people, service dogs can have a bad day because they don't feel well or may be

exhausted from work. Other dogs may be in-training, in which they may make some mistakes along the way. The law recognizes that the handler should have the opportunity to get the animal under control if there is a problem.

## Myth #5 It is a health code violation to permit dogs into restaurants and healthcare facilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects the rights of individuals with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animal in the same areas that the general public is permitted including restaurants, hospital waiting rooms and patient areas. Rules and laws that pertain to pet dogs generally do not apply to service dogs because they are not pets. A few rare examples of where a service dog may not be permitted are similar to restrictions for most of the public due to a sterile environment such as hospital burn units and operating rooms. Allergies and fear of dogs are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people using service animals.

From federal ADA website guidance and FAQs:

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.

Under the ADA, State and 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 allowed to go.

When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, only limited inquiries are allowed. Staff may ask two questions: (1) is the dog a service animal required because of a disability, and (2) what work or task has the dog been trained to perform. Staff cannot ask about the person's disability, require medical documentation, require a special identification card or training documentation for the dog, or ask that the dog demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task.

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, for example, in a school classroom or at a homeless shelter, they both should be accommodated by assigning them, if possible, to different locations within the room or different rooms in the facility.

A person with a disability cannot be asked to remove his service animal from the premises unless: (1) the dog is out of control and the handler does not take effective action to control it or (2) the dog is not housebroken. When there is a legitimate reason to ask that a service animal be removed, staff must offer the person with the disability the opportunity to obtain goods or services without the animal's presence.

People with disabilities who use service animals cannot be isolated from other patrons, treated less favorably than other patrons, or charged fees that are not charged to other patrons without animals. In addition, if a business requires a deposit or fee to be paid by patrons with pets, it must waive the charge for service animals.