

Service and Support Animals for Children and Youth with Special Health Needs

a toolkit for families

July 2024

Many children with special health needs benefit from a special bond with an animal. You may have seen an amazing support or service animal and wondered if your child or youth could have one too. This toolkit provides information and guidance about service animals.

Pets, Emotional Support Animals, Service Dogs, Therapy Animals – What’s the Difference?

Pet

A pet is a domestic animal that brings pleasure to a family’s life. It is not formally trained to provide service or support. The animal can be any species.

Emotional Support Animal

An emotional support animal is a pet that also provides an emotional support for someone with a disability or chronic health condition. Like other pets, an emotional support animal can be any species, and it may or may not have special training. Unlike service or medical alert dogs, emotional support animals are not addressed in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Service Dog

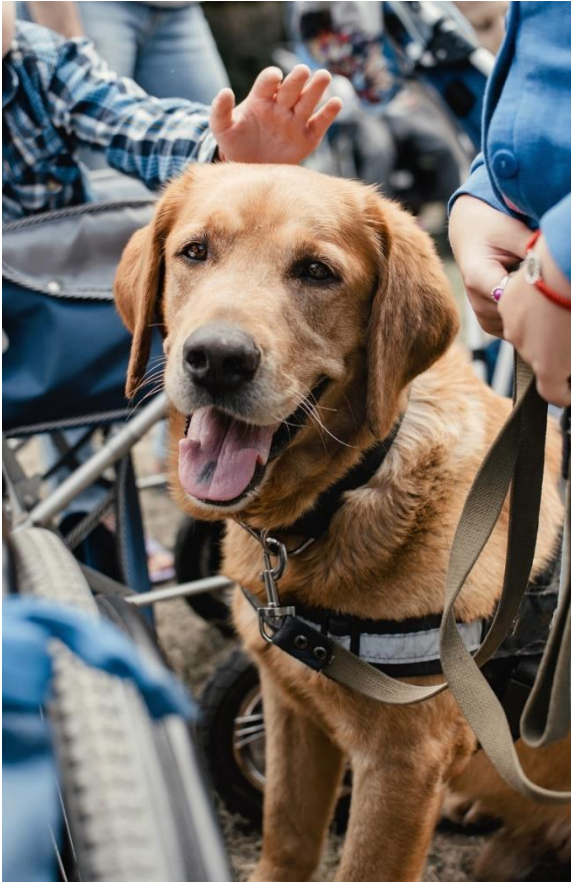
A service dog is trained to perform tasks that support the physical or emotional health of a specific person. A trained service dog can guide a person with vision loss, help a person with autism deal with sensory overload, help alert a deaf person to danger, help detect seizures, or help a person in a wheelchair navigate their home and community. The ADA requires that service dogs be allowed in all public spaces. (NOTE: Miniature horses can also be certified as service animals, if they meet the requirements detailed in the ADA.)

Therapy Animal

A therapy animal and its handler serve in public spaces like hospitals, schools and nursing homes. Therapy animals are social, obedient and calm. They allow people to pet them, which provides joy and comfort. Dogs, cats, rabbits, llamas, and miniature horses can be therapy animals. Therapy animals are registered and certified with an accredited organization.



Questions & Answers about SERVICE DOGS



How long does it take to get a service dog?

It takes two to three years for most organizations to match a family with a service dog. Because the dog is trained to meet the needs of an individual, the family usually spends several weeks on site working with a trainer before the dog goes home with them.

How old does a child have to be to get a service dog?

It depends. Some service dog organizations require a youth to be 16 years old, and able to care for the dog themselves. In some cases, for younger and/or medically fragile children, parents can be trained to handle the dog.

Do service dogs need ongoing training?

Yes. Just like a human, dogs can forget skills they don't use. They can also pick up bad habits. Some service dog organizations require owners to travel for annual refresher training.

What does a service dog cost, and why are they so expensive?

It can cost a family between \$17,000 and \$30,000 to get a trained service dog through an organization. They are expensive because of the costs of trainers, veterinarians, food, grooming, boarding, etc. Service dog organizations spend as much as \$60,000 to train and prepare a service dog. If a family gets a puppy and trains it themselves, it costs much less. (See the next page for more on families training dogs.) However, a purebred puppy from a recommended service dog line can still cost thousands of dollars. If someone offers you a free or inexpensive service dog, look closely at their credentials and check their references. A service dog that can't do the job does not serve the child or family.

Are landlords required to allow service dogs?

In most cases, the fair housing laws requires that landlords allow tenants to have service dogs, though there are exceptions. For specific questions, consult an attorney and read the federal guidelines.

Questions & Answers about SERVICE DOGS

continued

Can a family member train a service dog?

It's possible, if someone in the family has the time and patience. Owner training is an option for families who have older children, a stay-at-home caregiver with time to devote to daily training, and generally calm family lives. For most owner-trainers, it means getting a temperament-tested puppy from a reputable breeder of successful service dogs. Most owner-trainers work with a professional trainer who teaches them how to train the dog. During this process, the dog is in the family's care, which keeps costs lower.

What questions should I ask trainers?

Families should ask potential trainers what training and certifications they have, whether their certifications are current, and what guarantees and support they offer. Ask for a demonstration, and check references. Check to see if they are members of, Alliance of Therapy Dogs International, or the International Guide Dog Federation. Review any contract carefully before you sign it.

Can a child take their service dog to school?

The Americans with Disabilities Act includes the right to "Free Appropriate Public Education" (FAPE). If a child has a service dog, the school must hold a meeting with the 504 or IEP team to determine if the child needs the dog to participate fully in school. If so, the school creates a plan for introducing the dog to faculty, students, and staff. The plan must include transportation and sanitation. Schools are not required to provide handlers. Parents should know their rights and be prepared to work with schools on accommodating a service dog.

Can a family pet be trained as a service dog?

Without specialized training, most family pets won't succeed as a service dog. If you think your young dog might make a good service dog review, "[Is Your Dog Ready for Service Dog Training?](#)" from Atlas Assistance Dogs. It is highly recommended that you seek the advice and support of a professional trainer.



Questions & Answers about EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS

Are landlords required to allow emotional support animals?

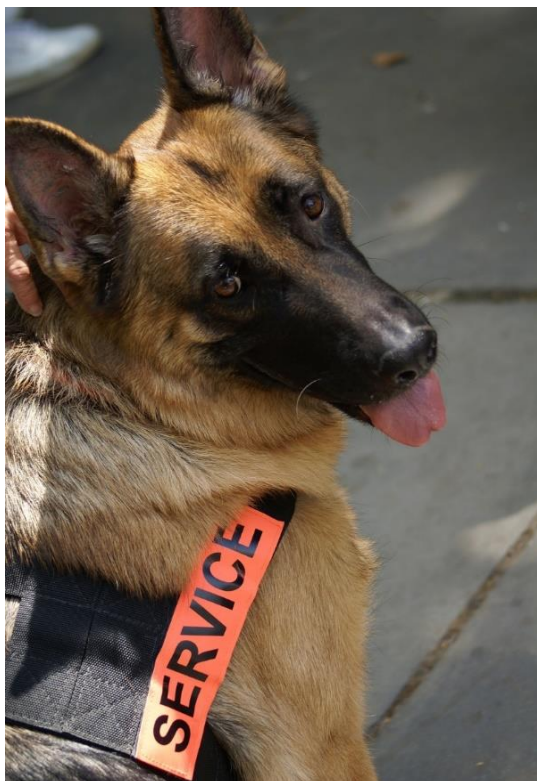
Landlords are required to make “reasonable accommodations” according to federal fair housing laws. A landlord can require owners to be responsible for waste cleanup, keeping the animal under control, and paying for any property damage caused by the animal.

Are schools required to allow emotional support animals?

Unlike service dogs, schools are not required by law to accommodate emotional support animals. However, some schools will work with families on the matter. A school might allow a planned visit from an emotional support animal, especially if an adult handler brings them. A family can open a dialogue with the school about their child’s emotional support animal at a 504 or IEP meeting.

Should a family ask a doctor to write a letter saying that a child needs their emotional support animal?

Some doctors will write a letter explaining why a support animal is important to a child’s emotional or physical health. Such letters might encourage landlords to make exception to their pet restrictions (like size or type of animal allowed, or pet deposit fees).



Buyer Beware!

Some companies offer to register a dog as a service animal, for a fee. These registries have no legal standing. The law specifically states that registry is *not* required for service animals.

Others may advertise letters for sale, stating that a child has an emotional support animal, or needs one. These letters have no legal standing, and they are not recommended.

Resources

Service Dog Organizations in Oregon

- [Assistance Dogs Northwest](#) paraplegia or quadriplegia
- [Canine Companions for Independence](#) hearing, service, PTSD
- [Dogs for Better Lives](#) hearing and autism
- [Guide Dogs for the Blind](#) visual impairment
- [Joy of Living Assistance Dogs](#) mobility, PTSD

Service Dog Organizations in Other States

- [4 Paws for Ability](#)- autism, hearing, medical alert
- [Canine Assistants](#) medical alert, mobility
- [Canine Companions](#) mobility, autism, hearing, Down syndrome
- [Dogs4Diabetics and National Institute of Canine Service and Training](#) diabetes
- [Domesti-pups](#) seizure, diabetes, mobility
- [ECAD Educated Canines Assisting with Disabilities](#) PTSD, medical alert, service, autism
- [Guide Dogs of America](#) blindness, autism
- [Little Angels Service Dogs](#) autism, medical alert
- [NEADS World Class Service Dogs](#) physical, hearing, autism
- [New Hope Assistance Dogs](#) seizures, diabetes, PTSD, TBI, autism, balance, medical alert, narcolepsy, hearing,
- [Paws with a Cause](#) physical disabilities affecting one or more limbs
- [Summit Service Dogs](#) mobility

Resources for Owner Training

- Book: *Love is All You Need* (2016) by Jennifer Arnold
- Book: *The Ultimate Service Dog Training Manual* (2020) by Keagen J. Grace
- [Atlas Assistance Dogs](#), support for owner/trainers- all task types
 - [Is Your Dog Ready for Service Dog Training?](#)
 - [Guidelines to Self-Training Approaches](#)

Financial Help for Getting a Service Dog

- [Chelsea Hutchison Foundation](#) seizures
- [Josh Provides](#) seizures - training only
- [Autism Care Today](#) autism
- [MIRA USA](#) visual impairment All expenses paid for guide dogs
- [Canines for Disabled Kids](#) fundraising platform

Financial Help for Care and Feeding of Service Dogs

- [Oregon Humane Society](#) resources for food and veterinary assistance
- [Bill Porter Fund](#) for people with cerebral palsy

Other Potential Funding Resources

- Disability Support Services Coordinator
- Coordinated Care Organization.
- Foundations associated with specific diagnoses
- [Oregon ABLE \(Achieving a Better Life Experience\)](#) Savings Plan

Laws and Rules Applying to Service and Support Animals

- [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) Requirements: Service animals](#)
- [ADA-TA: Service Animals and Schools](#)
- [Oregon Administrative Rules: Assistance Animals](#)
- [Oregon Department of Education: Student Access under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act \(see Appendix O\)](#)
- [Disability Rights Oregon: Service and Assistance Animals in Oregon](#)
- [Disability Rights Oregon: Service and Companion Animals - Know Your Rights](#)
- [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: Assistance Animals and Fair Housing](#)

Decision-Making Guide

Use this guide to help you with the big decision to get a service dog or support animal. Consider *all* family members' needs as you weigh your options.

QUESTIONS	NOTES
<p>What's the best fit for our family: service dog, support animal, or pet? Check all that apply.</p> <p>We need a service dog that can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Alert for allergens, seizures, or blood sugar changes<input type="checkbox"/> Alert for sounds and sights to improve independence and ability to live alone?<input type="checkbox"/> Alert for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or sensory overload<input type="checkbox"/> Fetch or carry things<input type="checkbox"/> Prevent child from running away<input type="checkbox"/> Assist with balance<input type="checkbox"/> Guide or orient<input type="checkbox"/> Something else <p>We need an emotional support animal to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Help cope with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, or sensory overload<input type="checkbox"/> Offer companionship, reduce loneliness, encourage socialization<input type="checkbox"/> Encourage calm or prevent tantrums<input type="checkbox"/> Provide motivation for physical activity<input type="checkbox"/> Provide a sense of safety or security<input type="checkbox"/> Something else <p>We need a pet than can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Offer affection and fun to the whole family.	
<p>Are there other ways we can meet our child's needs (like other types of equipment or training)?</p>	
<p>Do we have all the information we need to make our decision? If not, who should we talk to or where should we go for more information?</p>	

Continued on next page

Decision-Making Guide (continued)

Questions	NOTES
<p>Does everyone in the family <i>want</i> a service or support animal? If not, have we talked about that?</p>	
<p>Which family members most want a service or support animal?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The child or youth with special health needs <input type="checkbox"/> The parents or caregivers <input type="checkbox"/> The whole family 	
<p>Is anyone in the household allergic to animals, or afraid of them?</p>	
<p>Does anyone in the family have dog training experience? Do we know experienced animal owners we can ask for ideas or advice?</p>	
<p>Who would be responsible for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> training and handling <input type="checkbox"/> daily exercise <input type="checkbox"/> daily feeding and grooming <input type="checkbox"/> making and keeping vet appointments <input type="checkbox"/> paying for veterinary care and medical expenses <input type="checkbox"/> cleaning up waste 	
<p>Is our family able to afford a service or support dog? Have we researched what help might be available if cost is an issue?</p>	
<p>Are we prepared to welcome a new family member that requires daily attention, feeding, exercise, grooming, training, and cleaning up after?</p>	

Additional Notes:



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