



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 you have a disability if your body or brain works differently than most people, and that makes it harder or impossible for you to do things like hear, see, speak, think, walk, or breathe. The ADA says a service animal is any dog that is trained to do specific work or tasks that are hard to do for a person with a disability. In some cases, a miniature horse can also be trained as a service animal. Service animals are working animals, not pets.

What is a service animal's work or task?

A service animal needs to be trained to perform specific tasks for the person with a disability that it helps. The task(s) must be something you can watch the animal do. The person with a disability that the service animal is trained to help 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(s) 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 tasks 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 is not trained to do a specific 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 public is allowed to go.

Businesses and government agencies often say no "pets" are allowed inside their buildings. But the business or government agency must allow a handler with their service animal to go inside the building because a service animal is not a pet.

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, 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 business then must allow the handler to access their products or services in a different way.

How do I know an animal is a "service animal"?

A service animal must be a dog or a miniature horse. If the handler does not have a disability that 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?



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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.

A service animal does not need any form, certificate, vest, or picture ID to show it is a service animal. Most handlers put a vest on their service animal so it is clear the animal is “working.” This vest is a signal to others not to touch or distract the animal from its duties. Papers or vests purchased from the internet that say an animal is a service animal do not prove or mean anything under the law.

Some people may claim their dog is a service animal when it is not. This is considered service animal fraud, and many states have laws against service animal fraud that carry fines and possible jail time.

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. Businesses and government agencies should do their best to make sure people who are allergic to or afraid of dogs can be in another area, away from a service dog.

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.

Service animals that travel with their handlers on public transportation do not have to be dogs or miniature horses.

Who can I ask if I have questions about service animals or want more information about the ADA?

The ADA National Network answers questions and provides information about the ADA. Contact us toll-free, voice or TTY, at 1-800-949-4232 or [email](#) us to speak with one of our ADA Specialists.

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<http://www.adapacific.org>

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