

Service Dogs

Since 2011, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) only recognizes dogs as legitimate service animals. A service dog is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.

The following are *not* service dogs: those whose sole purpose is to provide emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship, or to serve as a crime deterrent. In addition, therapy dogs that visit nursing home residents, hospital patients, and others are not service animals. Search-and-rescue dogs, unless they are on duty, are not service dogs. None of these categories assist one individual with a disability in his or her activities of daily living.

A person who requires the use of a service dog has rights and obligations:

The right to be accompanied by the service dog.

The obligation to control the service dog in a manner that complies with the animal control laws of the area. *Control* equals behavior appropriate to the setting.

Service dogs are allowed in all areas, including a public entity's facilities and areas where members of the public, participants in services, programs, or activities, or invitees, as relevant, are allowed to go.

Two questions that the ADA allows you to ask a person with a service dog, if the disability is not obvious, are:

Is the dog required because of a disability?

What task has the dog been trained to perform?

Never ask about the person's disability. A majority of disabilities are unseen. You cannot ask for documentation that the dog is a service dog.

The only time a service dog can be off the leash,

harness, or tether is when it is necessary to do the work for which it was trained to assist the person with a disability. For example, a seizure alert dog may need to go for help if the person has a seizure.

You may ask the person with a disability to remove the dog from the premises if it is out of control, and its handler does not take effective action to control it; or the dog is not housebroken (for instance, while in the Visitor Center).

If a service dog is properly excluded, the individual with a disability is to be given the opportunity to participate in the service, program, or activity without having the service dog on the premises.