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Psychiatric Service Dog Partners Public Access Standard

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide general information regarding the behavior of owner trained service dogs that assist with disabilities.

Inappropriate Service Dog Conduct

- growling
- nipping, biting
- raising hackles (hair stands up on dog's back, either over the shoulders or full length of the back)
- showing or baring teeth
- lunging at other people or dogs
- being out of handler's control
- inappropriate elimination in public facilities (urinating or defecating)

Should your dog display any of these behaviors, you need to resolve the behavior through further training or with the help of a professional dog trainer. This is for the safety and wellbeing of everyone, including the dog. If these behaviors continue, you need to consider finding a different dog with a temperament more suited for service dog work.

There are several ways to gauge your dog's readiness to be a reliable team member. One milestone is to identify when your dog can move through any situation with little or no change in their body language and excitement level. If the dog is startled, they should quickly regain composure and return their focus to the handler with little or no reminders. The handler should not have to drag or forcibly restrain the dog to keep it in working position. A dog should be confident working in public and not be overly fearful.

Basic Recommendations for Service Dog (SD) Teams

A full service dog should be at least 18 months old and have achieved a level beyond basic obedience. At this stage of development a dog should maintain the mental stability to work full time as a service dog. Dogs should be the appropriate size and temperament for the work required of them. Dogs used for mobility work need to be at least two years old and should receive clearance from a veterinarian. A service dog should present a professional image by being well groomed, and should be licensed in accordance with local laws.

The dog's needs (food, water, and elimination) should always be first priority for the handler.

Recommended Equipment for SD Teams

- Any working gear that visually identifies the team as a service dog team is highly recommended and a gesture of courtesy to the public, but not required under the ADA.
- Some equipment that can be used includes leash, handle, collar, harness, vest, backpack, or cape, that is applicable for the work the dog performs.
- Protective clothing should be provided for the dog, including warming, cooling, and rainproof jackets and properly fitted boots when weather conditions warrant them.
- Retractable leashes are acceptable only when needed for disability-specific work.

Working Position

Each team's working position will be different to meet the unique requirements of the disabled handler. Small dogs that normally work from the handler's arms, lap, or a type of carrying device should also be able to perform the same behaviors and tasks and meet each challenge from the ground like the larger breeds.

1. Controlled Unload from Vehicle or Other Form of Transportation

The dog should be able to wait until instructed to exit the vehicle. The handler should be able to unload their dog and any other necessary equipment (wheelchair, walker, crutches, cane, etc.) with their dog following their instructions. The dog should be on a leash, harness, or carrying device for smaller dogs when exiting the vehicle and stay with the handler and under control.

2. Parking Lot Behavior

The dog should be able to remain in working position unless instructed to do otherwise. The dog should be able to navigate a parking lot environment with confidence and remain focused on their handler.

3. Controlled Entry Into a Building

The team should be able to enter a building in a controlled and safe manner. The dog should be confident when encountering varied types of flooring, the sounds of blowers, automatic doors, and other sounds associated with places of business. Some dogs are trained to safely operate manual and automatic doors for mobility impaired handlers.

4. Navigating a Store

The team should be able to move through the store together with the dog in working position. The dog should not attempt to solicit attention from others, knock into shelves, or interact with merchandise, such as sniffing or licking. The handler should be able to interact with the public and remain in control of their dog at all times or be able to regain control quickly should the dog show inappropriate conduct. The dog should be able to walk past areas such as the bakery section, meat section, and pet food aisle, and be able to ignore such distractions while staying focused on their handler. The SD should be able to maintain a working position beside a moving shopping cart.

5. Working with Distractions

Also see information listed under: "Inappropriate Service Dog Conduct". The dog should be able to perform their duties and remain focused on their handler. If the dog becomes distracted at any time, they should be able to quickly return their attention to their handler with very little or no redirection from their handler.

6. Obedience Training Recommendations

Your dog should be able to reliably perform the following basic commands:

- Stay
- Wait
- Sit, sit/stays
- Down, down/stays
- Come, recall
- Leave-it
- Heel

Your dog should also be able to perform the following behaviors:

- a. Able to perform duties around distractions: The dog may startle but must quickly recover and return to work. The dog should not bark, cower, growl, show any signs of aggression or cause the handler to fall or stumble.
- b. Dropped leash: The dog should be able to remain in working position and focused on the handler, should the leash get dropped, unless the dog temporarily leaves working position to retrieve the leash because it is trained to do so.
- c. Housebroken: The dog should not inappropriately eliminate.
- d. Working position: The dog should stay next to the handler in whatever position the dog performs their duties. The dog should walk calmly on a leash.
- e. Tolerance of the general public: The dog is able to greet a friendly stranger when instructed to do so by their handler. The dog is able to accept touch from veterinarian staff, groomers and others. The dog should remain confident and calm and not get overly excited or show any signs of fear or aggression.
- f. Look at or focus on the handler on command.

7. Restaurant

The team should be able to enter a restaurant or eating area and the dog should not attempt to eat or sniff any food on the floor or on tables. The dog should not beg from anyone or attempt to interact with other patrons or waitstaff. The handler should be able to move and place their dog in a space that still allows the dog to perform its duties, but does not interfere with the coming and going of other patrons and staff, for example, lying under or beside the table. Dogs should not be allowed on tables, chairs or benches at any time unless they are mitigating a disability for their handlers. It is acceptable for a small dog to be in the handler's lap only if the dog does not attempt to sniff or eat from the table. A handler should never feed their dog any food from the table.

***Exception**

If the dog has been trained specifically to sniff food for a health-threatening condition of its handler, then the dog can work at identifying the allergen by sniffing the food.

8. Elevator

The team should be able to load into an elevator and travel both up and down with the dog remaining confident and unruffled in a sit, down, or standing position. The dog should not sniff or attempt to consume anything on the floor or walls of the elevator or interact with others. The team should be able to enter and exit the elevator in a controlled manner. The handler should always be mindful that the handler and the dog are not separated by the closing of the elevator doors.

9. Stairs

If the handler uses stairs, the dog should maintain a working position. The dog should not cause the handler or others to fall or stumble. Teams that do not navigate stairways should be able to navigate wheelchair access ramps in the same manner.

10. Transportation

The team should be able to load, ride, and unload from whatever form of transportation the team uses in a comfortable and safe manner, whether it be an owner's car or public transportation such as a bus, metro, train, airplane, taxi, or other forms of mass transit.

11. Working Around Other Dogs

SDs should be able to maintain a working mode while in the presence of other dogs. They can take a casual notice of other dogs, but should not approach or become overly distracted.

12. Use of Public Restrooms

If the team uses public restrooms, large SDs can be placed in a stay command just outside of the bathroom stall should it be too small for both to occupy at the same time. It is advisable that the handler be able to maintain a connection with their SD by taking the leash under the stall door and keeping a hold on it.

Handlers should not allow their dogs to walk under partitions into adjoining stalls, place their heads into them, nor look into them.

Accessible stalls, when available, can be used with service dogs.

Psychiatric Service Dogs Partners' purpose is to promote the mental health of people using service dogs for psychiatric disabilities by educating, advocating, providing expertise, facilitating peer support, and promoting responsible service dog training and handling.