

Tips for interacting with friends and family members using service dogs:

- Do not touch the dog without permission from the handler.
- Do not distract the dog with noises, food, or attempts to pet.
- If you have a dog, don't let your dog approach, play with, or bark at a service dog while the dog is working.
- Communicate in respectful ways about your concerns and be willing to compromise.
- Do not expect the person to go without their service dog.
- Meet in public places if you do not want the service dog in your home.
- Stay with and support the handler during public access challenges, letting the handler take the lead.

Psychiatric Service Dog Partners

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Psychiatric Service Dog Partners

A guide for friends and family of people partnered with psychiatric service dogs



Psychiatric Service Dog 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.

When a person with a disability begins using a service dog, it can be a time of mixed emotions. There is hope that the person is getting the help they need, but it may raise additional concerns. This brochure is designed to ease the transition for friends and family of psychiatric service dog teams.

What is a psychiatric service dog?

It is dog of any breed, trained by the disabled handler, a program, or a private trainer to assist with disabling mental illness. They are not pets. They can, as examples, alert to panic attacks, mania, dissociation, or flashbacks; remind their partner to take medication; provide tactile stimulation during an episode; interrupt repetitive behaviors, racing thoughts, or nightmares; assist with hallucination discernment; and alert to strangers approaching.

Will we talk about mental illness?

If you'd rather not talk about mental illness, that's okay. You can tell your friend or family member that you support them and their service dog, but are uncomfortable discussing the specifics.



What can I expect when we go out?

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, service dogs are allowed anywhere the public is allowed, without asking permission. This includes stores, hotels, restaurants, movies, taxis, busses, and hospitals. Being in public with someone using a service dog can seem a little strange at first. Service dogs often attract attention from the curious public. You do not have to get involved when people ask questions about the dog. However, if someone tries to deny access to the team, it is helpful to stay with and support the human partner.

Can a human fill in for the service dog?

A service dog is an assistive device, like a wheelchair or a cane. Would you ask someone to leave their wheelchair or cane at home? Of course not! Many service dogs are trained to recognize and alert to cues humans cannot sense. For this reason, humans cannot replace a service dog.

What about private homes?

Legally, you are not required to admit a service dog to a private home. It is okay if you aren't comfortable with a dog in your home, but if you do not allow the dog, do not expect the person to come. A reasonable compromise may be to meet the team in a public place, like a park, store, or restaurant.

How will the dog behave indoors?

Talk about your needs and the handler's before the visit. Service dogs are well-behaved and usually remain in working mode, on leash, and not on the furniture. If you have pets or kids, do not let them



interact with the dog while it is working. If you are comfortable doing so, you may ask the human partner to allow the dog to be off-duty, in which case the dog will act like a dog!

Friends and family members say:

I was skeptical at first, but my wife's improvement with her service dog made me a true believer! Since her illness no longer controls us, instead of being her caretaker, I'm now her partner. —Brad

We do not have pets in our home, by choice. However, having a service dog in my home is not a hardship. I feel a great deal of love for her service dog and I think her service dog can tell! I am happy that my daughter has found a way to allow her to deal with her needs AND visit us. Life is short! —Suzanne

At first it was strange with all the stares and questions, but the transformation the service dog has brought to my wife's life has made it all worthwhile. People are now so used to seeing us with the dog that one time when he was not with us, everyone was disappointed and asked where he was. —Sean