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## **Public Access Standard**

### **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance regarding the appropriate behavior of service dog teams in public (independent of disability-mitigating work or tasks). This public access standard (PAS) complements PSDP's public access test (PAT) by providing further explanations of test items and more. However, the PAS is aimed at describing desired behaviors for the working life of the dog, rather than only for one test day.

PSDP does not certify teams, but individuals are welcome to use this standard in conjunction with PSDP's voluntary PAT for the purposes of service dog training or evaluation—and *not* as a basis for laws. PSDP is not liable for any risks or consequences of using these resources.

#### **Basic Recommendations for Service Dog Teams**

A graduated service dog should be at least 18 months old and have achieved a level of training beyond basic obedience. At this stage of development, most appropriate service dog prospects should be capable of the mental stability to work full time as a service dog. Before this age, dogs are prone to suddenly forgetting their training during "fear periods" or "teenager stages" that can last for months at a time. Don't rush graduating that perfect puppy, or be prepared for a possible demotion when you can't figure out why your puppy suddenly explores a new behavior pattern!

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 basic needs (food, water, elimination, and rest) should always be a top priority for the handler. Secondary needs are also important (exercise, mental stimulation, socializing/bonding, playtime, veterinary/health care, etc.).

#### **Recommended Equipment for Service Dog 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 relevant equipment includes a leash, handle, collar, harness, vest, backpack, cape, bandana, or leash slide. Which options are best depend on the team's needs and preferences, and may

change over time.

Protective clothing should be provided for the dog, including warming, cooling, and rainproof jackets and properly fitted boots when conditions warrant them. More information on appropriate and inappropriate equipment is under the "Training/Controlling Aids" item below.

## **PUBLIC ACCESS TEST ITEMS**

### **1. Training/Controlling Aids**

Teams should keep the use of treats and training aids to a minimum when in working mode. While PSDP encourages training throughout the lifetime of the dog, a service dog is generally expected to be already trained to do its job without coaxing through these means.

This does not mean the dog must be handled like a robot. Verbal praise and even petting to reward good behavior in public can be integral to maintaining your bond and encouraging your dog to enjoy working. Transition away from using training aids as your default so that you can rely on your dog's training even if the training aid runs out or breaks.

Pain- or fear-based training and control, including harsh leash or other physical corrections, are not acceptable. Other, often more effective methods are available that have a greater chance of preserving and encouraging a positive team relationship—which can be essential to your dog's health and happiness.

Consequently, outfitting a dog with any device designed to train or control by causing pain or anxiety (such as prong collars, choke collars, shock collars, and studded/prong harnesses) is not an accepted alternative to other training. A properly used head collar or non-prong, no-pull harness is acceptable long-term *only* if the handler needs such an item due to their disability. This kind of device should only be used as an emergency failsafe (e.g., safety for balance issues), and cannot be relied on to control the dog. Martingale and limited-slip collars are good for keeping a dog from backing out of its collar if the dog has a neck almost as wide as its head, but should not be used for corrections.

### **2. Leash Tension**

Teams should maintain an appropriate level of looseness in the leash or harness. The dog should not continuously/repeatedly strain at the leash—the leash should normally form a "J" shape by dipping down without tension.

Harness or leash tension is okay if it is actively needed for disability mitigation. For example, guide and other mobility dogs can work by pulling somewhat in response to a cue or other stimulus. Retractable leashes are acceptable only for needed disability-specific work. In either of these cases, you should always maintain control without excessive pulling or wandering.

### **3. Inappropriate Service Dog Conduct**

Your dog should not display any inappropriate behaviors bulleted below.

- growling or inappropriate, excessive barking
- nipping or biting
- showing or baring teeth
- lunging at other people or dogs
- being out of handler's control
- inappropriately eliminating (urinating or defecating)

You should always consider the context and different aspects of your dog's behavior to be prepared to deal with potential issues. For instance, certain tail wagging (like vibrating high to the left)<sup>1</sup> or raised hackles<sup>2</sup> may or may not be problematic in your dog, but they definitely can be and merit close attention. Paying attention to stress signs is also a good idea for everyone.

If any of these red-flag behaviors come up, you need to resolve the behavior through further training—ideally with the help of a professional dog trainer. This is for the safety and wellbeing of everyone, including your dog. The public should be justified in believing service dogs are safe, and you can't control inevitable surprise interactions. If these behaviors continue, you need to seriously consider finding a different dog with a temperament more suited for service dog work.<sup>3</sup>

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 its body language and excitement level. If the dog is startled, it should quickly regain composure and return its 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 or continuously fearful.

#### **4. Working Position**

A dog should be comfortable and confident in its working position. Dogs should not hide behind out of fear or forge ahead out of uncontrolled disconnection.

Each team's working position will be different to meet its unique requirements. One handler may need the dog to be in a slightly forward heel position in order to use the dog's trained reactions for hallucination discernment. A wheelchair user may need the dog in front to pull the chair, or behind to go through a narrow doorway.

A small dog may work exclusively from the user's lap when the person is seated in place. This may be to provide deep pressure therapy (like a weighted blanket for anxiety/autism) or for proximity to food for allergen detection. Some small dogs may even be held or pouched by default, in order to monitor for metabolic changes in the smell of the user's breath. All service dogs, regardless of size, should be trained to be under consistent control on the ground, in order to be prepared for situations where carrying is not possible (airport checkpoints, for example). See "2. Leash Tension".

Dogs should never be placed in situations that are dangerous to themselves or others. For example, a small dog should not be on the ground in a raucous, shoulder-to-shoulder festival. Similarly, handlers should take care not to allow their dogs in positions that may trip or knock over others, such as lying in a narrow aisle with foot traffic.

#### **5. Vehicles and Public Transportation**

Teams should be prepared to safely use any form of transportation of which they might avail themselves (personal car, taxi, bus, metro/subway/light rail, cable car, train, airplane, or other form of mass transit). For those in rural environments who anticipate *never* traveling by any other means, a car might be the only type of vehicle the team trains to use. However, since

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1 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/canine-corner/201112/what-wagging-dog-tail-really-means-new-scientific-data>

2 <http://mastersdegreedogtraining.com/2014/09/27/raised-hackles-a-sign-of-aggression-in-dogs/>

3 PSDP has many resources to help you find the right prospect.  
<http://www.psychdogpartners.org/resources/getting-a-dog>

we cannot always anticipate where life will take us, it is wise to gain exposure to as many types of transportation as you can. Training under controlled settings and keeping it under threshold is preferable to hoping these skills won't be needed and being in for a shock at your dog's reaction to a bus's air brakes hissing, for example.

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

Safely using a form of transportation includes not only entering and exiting, but also riding. What's appropriate is specific to the type of vehicle in question. Many handlers use a crash-rated seatbelt harness in cars to prevent their dogs from becoming projectiles in a crash.<sup>4</sup> Be sure an airbag is not armed for your dog's seat, since they're not designed to be safe for dogs. These safety choices are up to the individual, but remember that you don't always control whether you're in an accident, and it's better to be safe than sorry.

As a special warning, be sure to have a system ready when boarding or detraining from a subway car. These doors automatically close and aren't watching to make sure you're both on together. Many teams prefer to go through the doors in parallel so it's harder to be separated. If you have an over-the-shoulder leash or one otherwise attached to you, seriously consider taking it off and holding it to prevent avoidable harm if you are separated.

Your dog should be trained to ride in vehicles without significant anxiety or otherwise being worked up. The dog should remain under control at all times without the need for coercion.

## **6. Parking Lot Behavior**

Teams should transit the parking lot safely. The dog should be able to remain in working position unless cued to do otherwise. The dog should be able to navigate a parking lot environment with confidence and remain focused on its handler.

## **7. Controlled Entry into a Building**

Teams should be able to enter a building in a controlled and safe manner. Your dog should be confident when encountering varied types of flooring, the blasts of overhead blowers, automatic doors, and other sensations associated with places of business. If trained to do so for disability mitigation, the dog should be able to safely operate doors for the handler.

## **8. Navigating a Store**

Teams should be able to move through stores 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 by sniffing or licking. The dog should be able to walk past areas such as the bakery section, meat section, and pet food aisle, and be able to disregard such distractions to keep sufficient focus on the handler. (If the dog has been trained specifically to sniff food to aid with the user's disability, then the dog can work at identifying the trigger by sniffing the food from a reasonable distance.)

The handler should be able to interact with the public and remain in control of their dog at all times. Unless it is okayed beforehand with the handler and the other party, the dog should not solicit attention from others. If the dog happens to behave inappropriately, the handler should regain control quickly and respectfully.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.centerforpetsafety.org>

Assuming the person can use a cart, the dog should be able to maintain a working position beside while the person uses the cart. Generally, it is *not* a reasonable accommodation for a service dog to be placed in a shopping cart.<sup>5</sup>

## 9. Working with Distractions

Your dog should be able to perform its duties and remain focused on you. If your dog becomes startled or distracted at any time, it should be able to quickly return its attention to you with very little or no redirection. The dog should not be aggressive or fearful, or cause the handler to fall or stumble. See information under: “3. Inappropriate Service Dog Conduct”.

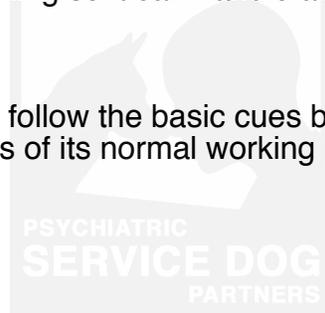
In addition to the basic contexts covered in other items on this public access standard, teams should focus training efforts toward environments that prepare them for both the more common and the more challenging places they will likely be. For instance, work or school environments are common for many people, and a dentist's office or airplane might be particularly challenging. There's a first time for everything you will encounter together, but it's wise to build up proficiency through piecemeal exposures to keep your dog under threshold and able to work. Dogs that are exposed to a high-pitched power tool sound in a familiar environment may be less likely to be afraid of the same type of sound later at the dentist's office. Similarly, riding on busses (etc.) is smart before hopping on a plane.

The world is unpredictable, so a service dog must have developed psychological shock absorbers through a breadth of training so it can handle anything.

## 10. Obedience Training

Your dog should be able to reliably follow the basic cues bulleted below in real-world situations on the ground, regardless of its normal working position:

- Stay
- Wait
- Sit, sit/stays
- Down, down/stays
- Come, recall
- Leave-it
- Heel
- Look/focus on handler



Handling a service dog in no-pet places requires skill beyond that of basic obedience. For example, your dog should be able to handle its leash being accidentally dropped.<sup>6</sup> The dog should be able to remain in working position and focused on you, unless the dog temporarily leaves working position to retrieve the leash because it is trained to do so.

A service dog must also tolerate the general public, since people are bound to approach and interact with your dog without you being able to notice in time to stop it. There are various behaviors associated with this. Your dog should be able to greet a friendly stranger, ignore them, or move out of their way, whichever you have cued or trained your dog to do. Your dog also must be able to accept touch from veterinary staff, groomers, and others. Your dog should remain confident and calm and not get overly excited or show any signs of aggression or undue fear.

<sup>5</sup> This is echoed in Q31 of DOJ's 2015 FAQ document. [https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service\\_animal\\_qa.pdf](https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Some handlers don't use a leash; they may exclusively use a harness or have some other justified means of control. In such cases, simply apply the sentiment in the leash statements in a reasonable manner.

## **11. Restaurant**

Teams should be able to enter a restaurant or eating area and the dog should not attempt to eat, lick, or closely sniff any food on the floor or on tables. (Once again, if the dog has been trained specifically to sniff food to aid with the user's disability, then the dog can work at identifying the trigger by sniffing the food from a reasonable distance.)

Your dog should not beg from anyone or attempt to interact with other patrons or waitstaff. The handler should be able to move and place the 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 most teams, this placement is lying under or beside the table. Dogs should not be allowed on tables, chairs or benches at any time. It is acceptable for a small dog to be in the handler's lap for disability mitigation only if the dog does not attempt to eat, lick, or closely sniff at food or the table.

A handler should never feed their dog any food from the table. If you are in an outdoor eating area and your dog needs water, some handlers find it acceptable to water your dog from its own container. Be sure not to leave spilled water on any smooth surfaces, inside or out.

## **12. Elevator**

Teams should be able to load into an elevator and travel up and down with the dog remaining confident and unruffled in a sit, down, or standing position. The dog should not closely sniff or attempt to consume anything on the floor or walls of the elevator, or interact with others without prior consent. The team should be able to enter and exit the elevator in a controlled manner. You should always be mindful not to be separated from your dog by the closing of the elevator doors; see "5. Vehicles and Public Transportation" for a detailed warning.

## **13. Stairs**

If you use stairs, your dog should maintain a position safe for all parties, which may differ from its usual working position. Your dog should not cause you or others to fall or stumble. Teams that do not navigate stairways should be able to navigate wheelchair access ramps in a similarly safe manner. In this case, users are encouraged to make sure their dog can handle stairs in case a situation arises where someone else needs to handle the dog.

## **14. Working around Other Dogs**

Service dogs 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. It is unusual for most teams to run into other service dog teams, but it happens. What is more common is encounters with pets that likely have much less training, and this happens in no-pet places. Teams must be prepared for surprises, and this kind is important.

## **15. Use of Public Restrooms**

You can use accessible stalls with a service dog when such stalls are available. Otherwise, a handler can place a large dog in a stay command just outside of the restroom stall, if it is too small for both to occupy. Handlers should then maintain a connection with the dog by taking the leash under the stall door and keeping a hold on it.

You should not allow your dog to walk under partitions into adjoining stalls, place its head into them, or look into them. This might not bother you, but not everyone is such a dog lover!