



Preliminary **INFORMATIONAL PACKET FOR THE 2021 PSDP CONVENTION**

The annual Psychiatric Service Dog Partners Convention is an event where people with mental health disabilities can learn more about working with their service dogs, have public access training and testing, and celebrate the freedom of going out and having fun with other service dog teams.

For sponsorship opportunities, see <https://www.psychdogpartners.org/sponsorship> for more information. Scholarships may be available for future conventions. See <https://www.psychdogpartners.org/scholarship> for more information.

Location & date

Good times and good friends await you in **Pineville, North Carolina!** Our 2021 PSDP Convention finds us in a new setting in the Charlotte, North Carolina area (near Rock Hill, South Carolina). Our main convention activities will take place in the 1488-square-foot Dogwood room of the Hilton Garden Inn at 425 Towne Centre Boulevard in Pineville.

Activities are planned starting on Friday night, **October 1st**, through Monday morning, **October 4th**. We also will have the convention room open for informal hanging out between scheduled activities. Many people are arriving on or before September 30th and leaving on October 5th or 6th, so there may be additional chances to get together with other PSDP community members around the time of the convention. There is a tradition of having breakfast together Monday morning to socialize and fare each other well (optional).

The Hilton Garden Inn in Pineville, NC is in walking distance of some eateries and a grocery store, as well as near a mall and a park. Breakfast is included in the room rates. You are responsible for your own food, but many choose to go in groups to restaurants within walking distance.

Travel & lodging

Pineville, North Carolina is not a long drive (in non-rush-hour traffic) from the very active Charlotte, North Carolina Airport ("CLT"). It's about a 15-mile drive from the Charlotte Douglas International Airport to the Hilton Garden Inn at 425 Towne Centre Boulevard in Pineville. This trip usually takes 20–25 minutes.

[Charlotte Area Transit System \(CATS\)](#) operates busses and streetcars that can get you from the airport to the hotel. At least one transfer is required. It takes between 1.5–2 hours during normal operating hours and costs \$2.20 plus one to two 80¢ transfers.

The cost (in April of 2021) of a one-way Uber or Lyft* ride is around \$13–\$21, and a taxi is roughly \$43 (no tip in these figures). Download the Lyft or Uber app and sign up to

use either of these services. The ride app (Uber/Lyft) pickup area is on the Arrivals/Baggage Claim (lower) level outside of Zone 4. The taxi area is nearby, outside of the baggage claim area as well.

The hotel is in South Charlotte off of I-485 at exit 64B adjacent to Carolina Place Mall. A few restaurants and a grocery store are walkable from the hotel for most folks. Convention-goers staying on site usually don't find it necessary to have a car during the convention.

Our group rate at the hotel is \$99/night (excluding taxes), which includes breakfast for two. More information is available on the registration page:

<https://www.psychdogpartners.org/resources/convention/2021-convention/2021-registration>

*PSDP is not endorsing or recommending Uber, Lyft, or any ride service.

Upon arrival

The stress of travel is not only felt by you, but also your dog. We highly recommend that when you arrive, before joining in with whatever the group is doing, you take a minute and relax with your dog. You have no obligation to check in with any social groups you may see on your way in, and everyone understands if you don't. Water yourself and your dog, maybe take a quiet walk together, or enjoy a power nap. Make sure that you and your dog are relaxed. This will help you and your dog have a better time, and will make it easier for your dog to focus on you instead of on the many other service dog teams there!

At the welcome meeting and throughout the convention, take advantage of the unique opportunities available. You will be surrounded by helpful, friendly, and experienced people who also want a great convention experience. Make friends and get contact info to continue to benefit from your shared adventures! Try to squeeze in working together on training during convention downtime. Sometimes training takes two people; consider training such things as alerting to the presence or approach of others, responding to being "down and out", etc.

Schedule

Please note that the schedule and activities are subject to change without notice.

All activities on this schedule (unless otherwise indicated) take place in the Dogwood room of the Hilton Garden Inn in Pineville, NC, on the evening of October 1st through the morning of October 4th. We also have the meeting room available much of the time as a social room when activities aren't scheduled.

Convention-goers must sign in upon arrival at the convention meeting room—at the latest during the mandatory welcome meeting. In case you want to print just the schedule (rather than have it on your mobile device), it is on the next full page so you do not have to print the entire info packet.

2021 Schedule

Friday, October 1st

Anytime before 7:00 p.m., feel free to relax & casually meet and greet in the lobby

7:30 p.m. Sign-in and welcome meeting (mandatory), convention meet & greet

Saturday, October 2nd

8:00–10:30 SDIT Manners Evaluation & Public Access Test (mandatory PAT breakfast at 8:00 in meeting space, cost not included in PAT fee)

9:00–10:30 Social breakfast for non-testers in meeting room or lobby (optional)

10:30–11:00 Committee meeting (closed meeting)

11:00–noon Your best service dog tails

noon–1:30 Lunch on your own

1:30–3:00 Ask a dog trainer

3:00–3:30 Break

3:30–5:00 Discussion and training with ambulance and crew

5:00–7:00 Dinner on your own

6:30–7:00 Committee meeting (closed meeting, tentative)

7:00–8:00 Social hour (informal)

Sunday, October 3rd

8:30–10:15 Social breakfast in meeting room

10:15–10:30 Group picture

10:30–noon Options: low-key dog activity area, “How do you train your dog to help with your disability?”

noon–1:30 Lunch on your own

1:30–3:30 Mall or park stroll

3:30–5:00 Handling self-doubt and other challenges of being a service dog user

5:00–7:00 Dinner on your own

7:00–8:00 Decompression and closing thoughts, initial room cleanup

Monday, October 4th

9:00–10:30 Social breakfast in meeting room, final room cleanup

Psychiatric Service Dog Partners

Activities

Sign-in (mandatory), welcome, and meet & greet

Check in, socialize with other teams, hear convention policies, and be welcomed by Dr. Veronica Morris. The welcome on Friday night starts at 7:30 PM. Say hi to old friends, meet new ones, and share in the excitement of the convention! Sign-in will be available and is required to use the room. If you cannot make this event and sign in on Friday, get in touch with Deanna to sign in before using the meeting space.

SDIT Manners Evaluation & Public Access Test (PAT)

On Saturday morning, Veronica facilitates PSDP's Service Dog in Training (SDIT) Manners Evaluation and Public Access Test (PAT). The fee is \$20 per test; it's a good idea to bring cash. For each test, there is a maximum of six teams, where a team is one dog and one person. If you are especially interested in taking a test, get in touch with Veronica ahead of time so she knows to expect you to sign up.

Social breakfast for non-testers

This is an informal time to hang out and eat. Generally, we encourage you to bring your filled breakfast plate and utensils back to the meeting room for a private/group experience. On Saturday, eating together is part of the public access test (PAT), but you don't have to be taking the PAT to eat with others in the meeting room.

Your best service dog tails

This lighthearted session is a place to share and listen to community members' most interesting and entertaining service dog experiences. Allison will lead this eyebrow-raising—and sometimes cringe-worthy!—peek into our own frivolity and lessons we sometimes learn the hard way.

Ask a dog trainer

In 2019, convention-goers had such a good time with the question-and-answer portion of a presentation that we invited the group back for a dedicated encore! Amy Bloom from Free Will Animal Training will be on hand for a revealing discussion that's sure to lessen the mysteries of our dogs' behavior.

Discussion and training with ambulance and crew

We all want our dogs to behave well in an emergency, but it's hard to prepare with a controlled simulation. Our friends from Mecklenberg EMS are sending an ambulance and crew so they can help us with training and we can educate each other about what to do when it comes to service dogs. This is a priceless experience!

Social hour

Friday night is a time to relax and have fun with other PSDP convention-goers. We will have art supplies available, such as pages to color or dot-to-dots to do, plus a way to make your own convention souvenir! There may be some fiddling and silly dancing, but there's a guarantee of a nice chat with peers—arguably the best activity at the convention.

Videos and pictures for the PSDP community

Throughout the convention, PSDP volunteers will take pictures and occasionally record video to help the cause. Be sure to catch one of our photographers for a portrait shot during the convention! (Let us know clearly if you'd prefer we don't identify you by name.) In addition, we have a group picture scheduled for Saturday morning. Be sure to be there with any PSDP green on if you have it.

As a special project this year, Brad plans to film some interviews for a mini-documentary about the impacts of PSDP and the convention in community members' lives. Your participation would help the cause, so please do connect with him for a few minutes of camera time.

Options: low-key dog activity area, "How do you train your dog to help with your disability?"

Depending on interest, you may have options at a Sunday session this year. In one part of the room, Christi will set up a small area for low-key dog/team activities. This will be more like the calm-but-fun rally obedience exercises than an agility race!

At the same time, Deanna will facilitate an always-helpful discussion where we ask each other questions and share tips about getting our dogs to help with our disabilities. We can only improve by trying—but it helps to strategize about what works and what doesn't!

Mall or park stroll

Depending on pandemic guidance and other factors at the time, we will be going to the nearby mall or park to socialize with each other. We want all convention-goers to experience the incomparable feeling of being in public with a large group of service dog teams.

Each person is welcome to visit either location for their social outing at this time, but convention organizers will pick one as the default. Rain may alter the plan.

Each location is a five-minute drive away and we will schedule the hotel shuttle to help get our group to the default location. Don't be late! The shuttle leaves at 1:30 sharp, so be waiting outside by 1:20 to load up.

Handling self-doubt and other challenges of being a service dog user

From "imposter syndrome" to unexpected training hurdles, Veronica will facilitate an exploration of our unique challenges and how to deal with them. Bring your questions and share your tips. We all benefit from developing our group wisdom!

Decompression and closing thoughts

Share what this convention has meant to you, what you've learned, and what you'd like to see next time. You'll also hear what to expect after the convention. Many attendees find this session essential to preparing your brain for re-entry into the world outside of our community cushion of understanding.

Policies & procedures

Bring your least-scented personal care products to this low-fragrance event; some are allergic.

This is a completely nut-free event. Do not bring any human or dog products containing nuts.

No weapons or illegal drugs will be permitted at this event (pocket knives are OK, as are any medications for which you have a prescription).

The consumption of alcohol or illegal substances is prohibited in PSDP spaces.

Convention-goers are welcome to do what they want to outside of our convention spaces.

Disruptive/inappropriate behavior may result in being required to leave PSDP spaces for a length of time proportional to the situation, in PSDP representatives' sole determination.

Food

We will have optional times to gather and eat meals together, but you must provide/buy your own food. You can bring food from home if you prefer.*

There are some restaurants and a grocery store within walking distance, and many more within a drivable distance. We suggest you use Google Maps to explore these options. On regular overhead view (non-satellite), just zoom in close enough and the names of the restaurants will show up on the map.

*As a reminder, this is a completely nut-free event. Do not bring any human or dog products containing nuts. Also, alcohol consumption is prohibited in PSDP spaces.

Dog behavior policy

This is a convention for handlers with service dogs and service dogs in training. As such, we expect that all dogs in attendance will be friendly with other dogs and people. Dogs displaying aggressive behavior will be asked to leave. If you prefer your dog be given extra space, we encourage you to signal this to others by tying yellow ribbon (available at the convention) to your dog's leash or collar.

When deciding whether this convention is appropriate for you and your dog to attend, look over the minimum requirements of PSDP's Service Dog in Training (SDIT) Manners Evaluation (<https://www.psychdogpartners.org/resources/public-access/manners-evaluation>). Teams should have a reasonable expectation, based on previous training, of being able to pass the SDIT Manners Evaluation. If you do not reasonably expect to be able to pass the SDIT Manners Evaluation with your dog at the time of the convention, or your dog has been known to be uncomfortable around other dogs or people, this convention may not be appropriate for your dog.

Before embarking on this trip, it would be wise to ensure that your dog is comfortable in the following situations: traveling on public transit, walking in a mall or crowded store, visiting restaurants, being in close quarters with other dogs and people, etc. If you have two service dogs, or a service dog and an SDIT, be aware that you will not be allowed

to leave any dog tethered or unattended, even in your hotel room. You must be able to handle both dogs safely yourself, or bring a human helper who can handle one of the dogs for you at the event.

When you are around other service dogs, keep your dog within 2 feet of you, and keep at least 2 feet between dogs at all times unless people say it is OK. Be sure to ask first before you or your dog greets another team. It is the job of the handler to ensure their dog is not invading another dog's space. This is an on-leash convention, and dogs should never be left unattended at the activities.

All dogs must be kept leashed to a collar, vest, or harness at all times, and the leash must always be held by a person. There are no exceptions, apart from disability-required situations that are approved in writing by Veronica Morris at the time of registration. This includes when your dog is relieving itself, unless in a gated/fenced area designed for this purpose (and then only if others present explicitly agree). This rule includes **all** PSDP activities. If you use a shoulder leash and it is not long enough for your dog to lie on the floor next to you while it is around your shoulder, please remove the leash from your shoulder and maintain a secure hold on it so your dog is never untethered from you.

Please be prepared to clean up after your dog. Bring appropriate bags and products to ensure that we leave the facility in the same condition that we found it or better. We are representing PSDP and all other service dogs by our behavior in public at this event, so it is important that we all obey these behavior standards. There will be a trainer on site to talk with if you are having any issues upholding these standards.

If you witness a dog grossly misbehaving (e.g. biting or fighting with another dog, repeatedly eliminating inappropriately, etc.), please report it to at least one of the people in charge as soon as possible. In circles, if your dog is disruptive or destructive for any reason, we expect you to remove your dog and resolve the situation before returning.

Elimination policy

For sanitation reasons, we ask you to prevent your dog from eliminating on any building, vehicle, or structure. All solid waste must be picked up immediately. Potty pads and litter boxes are not to be used. If a dog has elimination problems in indoor spaces, it will be asked to leave.

In addition, we ask participants to be conscientious in adhering to our P.U.P. policy—“Pick Up Poop”. If you see any dog waste in addition to your own dog's and you are able to pick it up, please do so! Our efforts to leave the area better than we found it are a great way to spread good will around our convention and toward our community.

Extra assistance recommendation

Some people need extra assistance from a person, beyond what our participant-volunteers can provide. If this might apply to you, we strongly recommend you bring/register a friend or family member who can help take care of your needs. Our participant-volunteers are not there as trained professionals, therapists, or veterinarians/behaviorists, but as fellow peers who just want everyone to have a good experience.

Minor policy

This is not a family vacation type of event. The convention is for handlers of psychiatric service dogs (PSDs) and psychiatric service dogs in training (PSDITs), and the activities will be geared towards these individuals. Children with PSDs or PSDITs are welcome to attend with a guardian, but please keep in mind the convention is a chance for people to speak freely about their mental illnesses and this may include discussions of self-injury, abuse, nightmares, and flashbacks. It is up to each parent to ensure their child is either OK with these discussions, or to remove the child from these discussions. If you have any questions, please email us at info@psych.dog.

Sales policy

PSDP may authorize products or services to be offered at the convention, such as team testing.

People sometimes bring gear to swap or sell on their own at the convention. Any offers by convention-goers of products or services for sale cannot be conducted in PSDP spaces during organized activities. Consistent with [List Rules 7 & 8](#), personal requests on the listserv for information to facilitate sales are prohibited.

Anyone selling items is personally responsible for security, financial transactions, and customer satisfaction. PSDP is not responsible for anything involving sales to which PSDP is not directly a party.

Public health measures

We are committed to following CDC guidance, as well as to respecting the health of our fellow convention-goers. Whether this means mask-wearing or other safety protocols will be determined based on the activity and on the guidance in effect at the time. We expect all participants to follow the guidelines convention leaders outline.

Emergencies

Service dog medical emergency—[Carolina Veterinary Specialists](#), 2225 Township Rd, Charlotte, NC, (704) 504-9608.

Human medical—(1) Emergency: [Atrium Health Pineville](#) at 10628 Park Rd in Charlotte, NC, (704) 667-1000. (2) Mental health crisis: [Crisis Text Line](#), text 741741; [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#), call (800) 273-8255.

Weather

History-based predictions for Pineville put the temperature range at 50°–72° F. Precipitation is expected for 8 days in October. Check the weather forecast before you go—and bring layers.

Packing list

This list is only a suggestion of items you may want to bring to the convention. Wear clothes suitable for walking around. The packing list is on a single page below in case you want to print it without printing the whole info packet (and you don't just want it on your mobile device).

Packing list

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clothing, including layers, long pants, shorts, t-shirts, and long-sleeved shirts (PSDP green/logowear is encouraged!) | <input type="checkbox"/> Medications, including prescriptions, over-the-counter pain meds, and motion-sickness meds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extra underwear and socks | <input type="checkbox"/> Games/cards |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pajamas | <input type="checkbox"/> Water bottle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sweatshirt or jacket | <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency contact & medical info for you and your dog |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hat for warmth | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog dishes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunglasses/hat/ballcap to protect from sun | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog food |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comfortable shoes to walk or hike in | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog medication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Soap and shampoo (unscented, please!) | <input type="checkbox"/> Towel for your dog |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deodorant—unscented | <input type="checkbox"/> Poop bags |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunscreen—unscented | <input type="checkbox"/> Service vest if you use one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Toothbrush and toothpaste (human & dog!) | <input type="checkbox"/> Collar and leash |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brush or comb (human & dog) | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog treats |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camera & film/storage, charged batteries | <input type="checkbox"/> Charging cords: camera, phone, etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Airline SD paperwork | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog toys |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vaccination record (human & dog) | <input type="checkbox"/> Portable dog watering bowl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mask | <input type="checkbox"/> Bag for dirty items |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> |

ACCIDENT WAIVER AND RELEASE OF LIABILITY FORM

I HEREBY ASSUME ALL OF THE RISKS OF PARTICIPATING IN ANY/ALL ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS EVENT, including by way of example and not limitation, any risks that may arise from negligence or carelessness on the part of the persons or entities being released, from dangerous or defective equipment or property owned, maintained, or controlled by them, or because of their possible liability without fault.

I certify that I am sufficiently fit, have sufficiently prepared or trained for participation in this activity if appropriate, and have not been advised to not participate by a qualified medical professional. I certify that there are no health-related reasons or problems which preclude my participation in this activity.

I acknowledge that this Accident Waiver and Release of Liability Form will be used by the event holders, sponsors, and organizers of the activity in which I may participate, and that it will govern my actions and responsibilities at said activity. In consideration of my application and permitting me to participate in this activity, I hereby take action for myself, my executors, administrators, heirs, next of kin, successors, and assigns as follows:

(A) I WAIVE, RELEASE, AND DISCHARGE from any and all liability, including but not limited to, liability arising from the negligence or fault of the entities or persons released, for my death, disability, personal injury, property damage, property theft, or actions of any kind which may hereafter occur to me including my traveling to and from this activity, THE FOLLOWING ENTITIES OR PERSONS: Psychiatric Service Dog Partners (PSDP) and/or their directors, officers, employees, volunteers, representatives, and agents, and the activity holders, sponsors, and volunteers;

(B) INDEMNIFY, HOLD HARMLESS, AND PROMISE NOT TO SUE the entities or persons mentioned in this paragraph from any and all liabilities or claims made as a result of participation in this activity, whether caused by the negligence of release or otherwise.

I acknowledge that PSDP and their directors, officers, volunteers, representatives, and agents are NOT responsible for the errors, omissions, acts, or failures to act of any party or entity conducting a specific activity on their behalf.

I acknowledge that this activity may involve a test of a person's physical or mental limits and carries with it the potential for death, serious injury, and property loss. The risks include, but are not limited to, those caused by terrain, facilities, temperature, weather, condition of participants, equipment, vehicular traffic, lack of hydration, and actions of other people including, but not limited to, participants, volunteers, monitors, and/or producers of the activity. These risks are not only inherent to participants, but are also present for volunteers.

I hereby consent to receive medical treatment which may be deemed advisable in the event of injury, accident, and/or illness during this activity, in cases where I am unable to give/deny consent at the time.

I understand while participating in this activity, I may be photographed. Unless I make it clear otherwise to anyone engaged in the recording of my likeness, I agree to allow my photo, video, or film likeness to be used for any legitimate purpose by the activity holders, producers, sponsors, organizers, and assigns.

The Accident Waiver and Release of Liability Form shall be construed broadly to provide a release and waiver to the maximum extent permissible under applicable law.

I CERTIFY THAT I HAVE READ THIS DOCUMENT AND I FULLY UNDERSTAND ITS CONTENT.

I AM AWARE THAT THIS IS A RELEASE OF LIABILITY AND A CONTRACT AND I SIGN IT OF MY OWN FREE WILL.

Participant's Signature (Please print legibly.)	Date	Participant's Name	Age
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Parent/Guardian Signature (If under 18 years old, Parent or Guardian must also sign.)	Date
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