

Working Dogs Explained

Emotional Support Animal (ESAs)

ESAs are a hot button as of late. An ESA can live with an individual in housing, but NOT allowed in public (like that of a service dog). Basically, an emotional support animal is **not a pet**. An emotional support animal is a companion animal that provides therapeutic benefit to an individual with a mental or psychiatric disability. The person seeking the emotional support animal must have a **verifiable disability** (the reason cannot just be a need for companionship). The animal is viewed as a "reasonable accommodation" under the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 (FHA or FHAct) to those housing communities that have a "no pets" rule. In other words, just as a wheelchair provides a person with a physical limitation the equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, an emotional support animal provides a person with a mental or psychiatric disability the same opportunity to live independently. Most times, an emotional support animal will be seen as a reasonable accommodation for a person with such a disability. Failure to make reasonable accommodations by changing rules or policies can be a violation of the FHA unless the accommodation would be an undue financial burden on the landlord or cause a fundamental alteration to the premises. Some airlines allow those with ESAs to fly with them but this is really up to the airline. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses the term "assistance animal" to cover any animal that works, provides assistance, or performs tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability, or provides emotional support that alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person's disability. ([FHEO Notice: FHEO-2013-01](#) at page 2). An emotional support animal is one type of assistance animal allowed as a reasonable accommodation to a residence with a "no pets" rule.

- Letters for ESAs contains the following information:
 1. Have a date that is no more than a year old
 2. Be on a mental health professional's letterhead (any healthcare professional who treats mental illness including primary care physician)
 3. Include the licensing information of the treating professional
 4. State that the individual is under that professional's treatment
 5. State that the professional considers the person to be either disabled or substantially limited in their ability to perform major life activities (should list the major life activities for best results)
 6. State that the individual has been diagnosed with a mental illness which appears in the DSM-IV
 7. State that in the professional's professional opinion, the presence of the emotional support animal is necessary for a reason that is directly related to the disability either during the flight OR at the destination. So, for example, if you have a double amputee, it might be emotional support for depression resulting from the loss of both legs and the trauma surrounding the loss, though they don't have to go into even that much detail. It could just be a statement like "emotional support for the treatment of depression resulting from being disabled."
- An emotional support animal is a companion animal of a person with a diagnosed psychiatric disability. **Emotional support animals are NOT allowed in public.**
- **There is no special training for Emotional Support Animals, which is why they are not allowed in public, only in housing.**
- The designation of an emotional support animal is made by a mental healthcare professional the individual is being treated by. **Any type of online "certification,"**

“registration,” “paperwork” or “card” that you can buy is a scam and is totally illegal. Only an individual’s mental health professional can approve the request for an emotional support animal as part of their treatment plan.

- Emotional Support Animal Law comes from the Fair Housing Act which is executed by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Fair Housing act states that housing providers cannot discriminate based on disability. An Individual with a disability that has an ESA is requesting that the housing landlord accepts an ESA as a “reasonable accommodation” for the handler.
- The landlord does not have to accept the request of an ESA if the landlord will be faced with additional undue burden. If the ESA is accepted by the landlord, the landlord cannot charge you an initial pet deposit or fee, but can ask for repayment later of any damage the animal may have caused.
- https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/fair_housing_act_overview
- https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/reasonable_accommodations_and_modifications
- https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/assistance_animals
- <http://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-06-16-Emotional-Support-Animal-Fact-Sheet-for-Website-final.pdf>

Service Dog

- a dog that is highly trained to complete tasks for the handler that mitigate their disability, as well as being highly trained to not cause any disturbance in public.
- A service animal is a dog (or miniature horse, but mostly dogs), that is owned by a person with a disability. The dog does tasks for the owner which the owner cannot do for themselves (Guide dogs, Hearing alert, Seizure alert, etc.)
- “Emotional support” is not considered a task. Again, **there is no “registration” “certification,” “card,”**. A service dog is considered a service dog based on their behavior and tasks. They have to be very well behaved, a non-disturbance, and perform tasks that assist the handler.
- Some examples of psychiatric service dog tasks are:
 - Deep Pressure Therapy. when the handler is having a panic attack, falling into a dissociative state, etc., the dog can alleviate symptoms by performing deep pressure therapy. Also known as tactile stimulation.
 - “Disruption” Tasks. This is where the dog is trained to identify an anxious behavior that their handler does, and disrupts it. For example, I knew someone who, when anxious, they would pull out their hair to the point where they would bleed. Their service dog recognized the action of the handler pulling her hair out, and would disrupt that behavior by pawing at her arm when she did it.
 - “Find an Exit”. Dog is trained to find the nearest exit on cue when the handler is faced with too many triggers or about to panic.
 - “Crowd Control” or “Distancing” Tasks. These tasks work for people who are anxious of crowds. The dog can circle around them or stand in front of them in a way that acts as a barrier for the handler.
- The ADA FAQ about Service dogs is very easy to read and understand. It outlines the laws and is attached here: https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.html
- This is another website specifically for psychiatric service dog handlers: <https://www.psychdogpartners.org/>

- Sometimes, the task training is easier than the public access training. You can expect full service dog training to take approximately 2 years, whether they are facility trained or owner-professional trainer-trained. Some examples of proper manners required of a service dog are:
 - No aggressive behavior toward people or other animals - no biting, snapping, snarling, growling or lunging and barking at them when working off your property.
 - No soliciting food or petting from other people while on duty.
 - No sniffing merchandise or people or intruding into another dog's space while on duty.
 - Socialize to tolerate strange sights, sounds, odors etc. in a wide variety of public settings.
 - Ignores food on the floor or dropped in the dog's vicinity while working outside the home.
 - Works calmly on leash. No unruly behavior or unnecessary vocalizations in public settings.
 - No urinating or defecating in public unless given a specific command or signal to toilet in an appropriate place.

Therapy Animals (like what we do here at Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy)

Animal Therapy provides therapeutic modalities through animal-assisted interactions to improve emotional and physical health of like clients visited. Animal Therapy volunteer handler-animal visit hospital patients, rehabilitation centers, assisted living and long-term care facilities, hospices, adult daycare centers, public schools, courthouses and more. If you and LuLu are interested in becoming a volunteer with Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy, here is the link for the upcoming spring 2020 training. Please fill out an application link below to be added to the waiting list, <https://www.tmh.org/services/animal-therapy/animal-therapy-volunteer-application>. We recommend that dogs come in knowing basic obedience cues and are well socialized, comfortable being touched all over, visiting with friendly strangers and in new environments.