

Service Dog Information & Training Guidelines

Service Dog Trainer Schools

There are only a few dozen schools around the country that train Service Dog Trainers. Most are small and began with Military, Police and Assistance Dogs for disabled individuals. Eventually these facilities developed training programs and apprenticeships for new trainers. Today the top training schools are Bergin University, Association of Professional Dog Trainers and Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT).

There is no state or federally recognized certification for any type of Dog Trainer, including Service Dog Trainer. Many service dog schools and dog training facilities offer training and apprenticeship programs for new trainers; those training programs may “certify” that graduates have passed their training course once complete.

What are the standards for Service Dogs Training?

Service Dogs have worked successfully in the public for over 80 years and won acceptance by achieving high behavioral and training standards which set them apart from pets and other animals. The exemplary conduct of those Service Dogs led to state legislatures granting access rights to the blind, deaf and mobility impaired. Those early developments paved the way for the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and International Association of Assistance Dog Partners (IAADP) has developed minimum training standards for Service Dogs that most trainers and organizations follow as an internationally-recognized gold standard of Service Dog Training. (*see attached test & training details*)

What does the American With Disabilities Act say about Service Dogs?

The ADA law regarding Service Dogs is written to allow disabled individuals access with their Service Dogs in public with as few barriers as possible. The ADA states in section § 35.136 part (f) “A public entity shall not require documentation, such as proof that the animal has been certified/trained/licensed as a service animal.”

Service Dogs that are trained in a nationally recognized program or facility can be very expensive, and out of the affordable budget of many disabled individuals; some Service Dogs can cost upwards of \$10,000. Unfortunately, training programs and facilities around the country aren’t capable of supplying Service Dogs for every disabled individual who needs one. Without private organizations and trainers many disabled individuals would never be able to benefit from a Service Dog. The ADA law allows for disabled individuals to train their own Service Dogs or seek private training. The U.S. Department of Justice held open voting to revise the ADA law and the updated version eliminated animals other than dogs and miniature horses, and officially included Psychiatric Service Dogs which can help with severe depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

You can view the full ADA law here: http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleII_2010/titleII_2010_withbold.htm

Minimum Training Standards for Service Dogs

& Public Access Testing

Amount of Schooling: an assistance dog should be given a minimum of one hundred twenty (120) hours of schooling over a period of Six Months or more.* At least thirty (30) hours should be devoted to outings that will prepare the dog to work obediently and unobtrusively in public places.**

Obedience Training: a dog must master the basic obedience skills: "Sit, Stay, Come, Down, Heel" and a dropped leash recall in a store in response to verbal commands and/or hand signals.

Manners: a dog must acquire proper social behavior skills. It includes at a minimum:

- 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.

Disability Related Tasks: the dog must be individually trained to perform identifiable tasks on command or cue for the benefit of the disabled human partner. This includes alerting to sounds, medical problems, certain scents like peanuts or situations if training is involved.

Prohibited Training: Any training that arouses a dog's prey drive or fear to elicit a display of aggression for guard or defense purposes is strictly prohibited. Non-aggressive barking as a trained behavior is permitted in appropriate situations.

A Trainer's Responsibilities: Trainers function as ambassadors for the assistance dog movement. This includes a disabled owner trainer, a provider's staff or a volunteer with a puppy or adult dog "in training." It also includes an assistance dog partner or able bodied facilitator helping a disabled loved one to keep up an assistance dog's training. At a minimum, you should:

- Know pertinent canine laws (i.e. leash laws and public access laws)
- Ensure the dog is healthy, flea free and the rabies vaccination is up to date
- Take time to make sure your dog is well groomed and free of any foul odor
- Show respect and consideration to other people and property.
- Use humane training methods; monitor the dog's stress level; provide rest breaks.
- Carry clean up materials. Arrange for prompt clean up if a dog eliminates or gets sick.
- Be polite and willing to educate the public about assistance dogs and access rights.