

Definition of Assistance Dog Types

Assistance dogs can be trained to do many different types of jobs but not all dogs are suitable to be assistance dogs.

If you are considering owning or training a dog to become an assistance dog this information will define what each type of assistance dog can do and some information about their public access rights.

Assistance dog

The three types of Assistance Dogs are *Guide Dogs* for the blind and visually impaired, *Hearing Dogs* for the deaf and hard of hearing, and *Service Dogs* for people with physical disabilities other than those related to vision or hearing. These types of assistance dogs are used to mitigate a physical disability and therefore will need to be able to have public access in most places including places where pets are prohibited. Some private establishments may require prior approval before allowing the animal on their property. For more information on access and laws for each state, visit <https://www.assistedogsinternational.org/access-and-laws/adi-guide-to-assistance-dog-laws/>

Guide Dog

Dogs that are trained to assist blind and visually impaired people by avoiding obstacles, stopping at curbs and steps, and negotiating traffic. The harness and U-shaped handle fosters communication between the dog and the blind partner. In this partnership, the human's role is to provide directional commands, while the dog's role is to insure the team's safety even if this means disobeying and unsafe command.



Additional Resources

Please contact our Behavior Team to speak with a skilled behavior specialist.

BehaviorTeam@spca.org

214-461-5169

www.spca.org/petuniversity

See Also:

[Selecting an Assistance Dog](#)

Hearing Dogs

Dogs that are trained to assist deaf and hard of hearing individuals by alerting them to a variety of household sounds such as a door knock or doorbell, alarm clock, oven buzzer, telephone, baby cry, name call or smoke alarm. Dogs are trained to make physical contact and lead partners to the source of the sound.

Service Dogs

(As defined by ADI) Service Dogs assist physically disabled people by retrieving objects that are out of their reach, pulling wheelchairs, opening and closing doors, turning light switches off and on, getting help by finding another person or using a device to call 911, assisting ambulatory persons to walk by providing balanced direction counterbalance and many other tasks as needed by the disabled person.

A Service Dog may also be defined as a dog that has been specially trained for Search and Rescue, Narcotics or Explosive Detection, Agriculture, Police or Customs work.

Social/Therapy Dog

(As defined by ADI) A dog who is permanently placed in a home or care giving facility to provide therapeutic benefits. A trained designator facilitator is required to oversee all the tasks and activities and care of the dog. These dogs have access only to the facility that they live and work at. A Social/Therapy Dog does may not have public access rights to any other location that is not pet friendly.

Therapy Dog

A therapy dog is not legally defined by federal law. They provide people with contact to animals, but are not limited to working with people who have disabilities. They are usually the personal pets of their handlers, and work with their handlers to provide service to others. They are often seen visiting hospitals and nursing homes. Therapy dogs do not have any public access rights except in the facilities that have given prior approval for that specific dog to enter. Therapy dogs are welcome to visit pet friendly facilities.

More information:

[ADA Requirement for Service Animals](#)

[Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals, ADA National Network](#)

[Assistance Dogs International \(service dogs\)](#)

[Pet Partners \(therapy animals\)](#)

[Service Animals, APDT Position Statement](#)