

Considerations for therapy dogs in schools

KCSS

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Definitions

- **Service Dog:** As defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), service dogs are individually trained to perform specific tasks and to work with people with disabilities. According to the ADA, disabilities can be “physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.” The work of the service dog must be directly related to the handler’s disability.
- **Working Dog:** A working dog is a purpose-trained canine that learns and performs tasks to assist its human companions. Detection, herding, hunting, search and rescue, police, and military dogs are all examples of working dogs. Working dogs often rely on their excellent senses of smell to help out where humans fall short.
- **Therapy Dog:** Therapy dogs play a different helping role than service dogs and emotional support animals. They aren’t trained to live with a specific handler. Rather, these are dogs that — with their human teammate (often the dog’s owner) — volunteer in clinical settings, such as hospitals, mental health institutions, hospices, schools, and nursing homes, where they provide comfort, affection, and even love in the course of their work. Therapy dogs are trained to be comfortable in new environments and to interact with different people. They should have a calm temperament, be unfazed by unfamiliar noises and movements, be comfortable being handled, and love people.
- **Emotional Support Animal:** Emotional support dogs are not considered service dogs under the ADA. They may be trained for a specific owner, but they are not trained for specific tasks or duties to aid a person with a disability, and this is the main difference between ESAs and service dogs. This doesn’t minimize the support these dogs provide for people with a psychological disorder. They’re considered companion animals and ease anxiety, depression, some phobias, and loneliness. In order to be considered an emotional support dog, it must be prescribed by a mental health professional for a patient with a diagnosed psychological or emotional disorder, such as anxiety disorder, major depression, or panic attacks.

Source: [American Kennel Club](#)

Therapy Dog

- **School Facility Dogs:** Generally owned by a school or district and assigned to a handler who is evaluated and registered by a credentialing organization such as Assistance Dogs International. Liability insurance is covered by the school/district along with cost unless funded through community partnerships. The work schedule mirrors the handler's schedule and is integrated into student lesson plans.
- **Therapy Dogs:** A pet belonging to an individual (usually the handler) that has been evaluated and registered by a credentialing organization such as the American Kennel Club (AKC) Canine Good Citizens Program or Alliance of Therapy Dogs (ATD). Cost and insurance are covered by the handler. The amount of work per day is limited in duration.

Source: [Ohio School Safety Center](#)

Therapy Dogs in Educational Settings

- **Identify your classroom goals:** There are many benefits to having therapy animal teams visit with students. Establish your goals and be ready to share these with the handler(s) who may visit your classroom in the future.
- **What to look for in a certified therapy dog:** Completion of animal therapy handler training, health screening of animal, liability insurance
- Successful implementation of therapy dogs in an education setting appear to revolve around (1) flexibility of the dog therapy program to target school's needs, (2) qualities of program instigator, (3) whole-school support, (4) communication, training and education, (5) considerations for dog's welfare.

Sources: [Pets in the Classroom](#), [PubMed Central](#)

Therapy Dogs, Continued

- Therapy dog SEL integration includes three important stages: identification, implementation, and evaluation.
- School administration and members of the school board develop a policy and plan for therapy dog to begin working at school with the students and staff.
- Communicating with families and parents to encourage them to share their concerns and questions.
- Plan for such issues as allergies, dog aversion and fear of dogs.

Source: [Edutopia](#)

Service Dog

- The Department of Justice continues to receive many questions about how the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) applies to service animals. The ADA requires State and local government agencies, businesses, and non-profit organizations (covered entities) that provide goods or services to the public to make “reasonable modifications” in their policies, practices, or procedures when necessary to accommodate people with disabilities. The service animal rules fall under this general principle. Accordingly, entities that have a “no pets” policy generally must modify the policy to allow service animals into their facilities. This publication provides guidance on the ADA’s service animal provisions and should be read in conjunction with the publication [ADA Revised Requirements: Service Animals](#).

Service Dog

- **ADA Requirements: Service Animals** (ADA)
 - This publication provides guidance on the term “service animal” and the service animal provisions in the Department’s regulations.
 - Beginning on March 15, 2011, only dogs are recognized as service animals under titles II and III of the ADA.
 - A service animal is a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability.
 - Generally, title II and title III entities must permit service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas where members of the public are allowed to go.

Working Dog

Just a few of the jobs performed by working dogs include:

- **Search and rescue.** From missing persons cases to natural disasters, dogs have been an integral part in finding people in dire situations. Search and rescue (SAR) dogs can either use a scent in the air or the scent of a specific object to find who they're looking for. They can be used in many different situations, including disasters, cadaver searches, drowning situations, and avalanches. Bloodhounds are widely used in this role.
- **Explosives detection.** These canine heroes work with the police, Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and military to locate dangerous materials. The dogs go through an intense training course to learn how to locate and identify a wide variety of explosives and to alert their handlers of its presence. Breeds that excel in this kind of work include the German Shepherd and Belgian Malinois.
- **Cancer detection.** Believe it or not, scientists were able to train Labrador Retrievers to sniff out cancer in patients' breath by smelling samples and sitting down in front of the one that was cancerous. Cancer cells give off different odors than regular cells and they change the way a person's breath smells— a dog's keen nose can tell the difference. In one case in particular, the Lab correctly diagnosed the disease 98 percent of the time, whereas a test that is commonly used found the cancer only 10 percent of the time.
- **Allergy alert dogs.** These dogs are trained to detect the allergen and its residue at schools, social events, and everyday activities and alert their owner. Their training is similar to that of a police dog learning to track scents or drugs. Breeds commonly trained as allergy alert dogs are the Poodle and the Portuguese Water Dog.

Source: [American Kennel Club](#)

Emotional Support Animal

- An Emotional Support Animal (ESA) is an animal that provides a therapeutic benefit (e.g., emotional support, comfort, companionship) to a person with a mental health or psychiatric disability (such as a serious mental health condition). An ESA is not considered a Service Animal, but under U.S. law, an emotional support animal is also not considered a pet and is generally not restricted by the type of animal.^{1, 2} Any domesticated animal may be considered as an ESA (e.g., cats, dogs, mice, rabbits, birds, hedgehogs, rats, minipigs, ferrets, etc.) and they can be any age. However, an ESA must be able to be manageable in public and does not create a nuisance.
- ESA's do not perform specific tasks, instead, it is the presence of the animal that relieves the symptoms associated with a person's serious mental health condition. For a person to legally have an emotional support animal (ESA), the owner must be considered to have a qualifying mental health or psychiatric disability by a licensed mental health professional (e.g., therapist, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.), which is documented by a properly formatted prescription letter. The difference between a legitimate ESA and a pet is the letter from your licensed mental health professional.

Source: [UMass Chan Medical School](#)