

Service Dogs

They're everywhere these days, aren't they?! And whether you love dogs or are afraid of them it's hard to know what's allowed, practical or legal. Here's a quick summary:

First, I'm talking here about Service Dogs, not Therapy Dogs - those dogs goodhearted people bring to hospitals and horrible events to help others, or Emotional Support Dogs - those animals people acquire to help them cope (typically at home), but Service Dogs: Dogs, specifically trained to perform a task to assist an individual with a disability.

- ❖ Service Animals can be either dogs or miniature horses that weigh less than 100 pounds
- ❖ Any breed of dog can be a Service Dog (SD)
- ❖ Trained SD's are allowed to accompany their person practically anywhere they go
- ❖ By law, you may ask an individual with a service animal 2 questions: 1) is the animal a service animal required because of a disability? and 2) what work or task has the animal been trained to perform?
- ❖ Allergies or fear of dogs are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people with service animals
- ❖ Puppies are not SD's and typically not put into task training until 18 months when advanced manners have been perfected
- ❖ By law, there are only 2 reasons a service animal and their handler can be asked to leave an establishment, 1) the animal is out of control and the handler doesn't get control or 2) the animal goes to the bathroom
- ❖ SD's in training are regulated at the state level, Colorado considers dogs-in-training as Service Dogs
- ❖ Certifying a trained SD is difficult. Less than 50% of the dogs bred for this work graduate
- ❖ Certified SD's typically have more than 100+ hours of training
- ❖ Being a SD is difficult! People are unpredictable, and having to be around them, watch them and constantly be ready to move - but not react – is crazy-difficult for most dogs

Service Dog training involves three components; basic and advanced manners, task training and environmental proofing. All three are crucial to a well-trained and grounded dog as well as a dog that always behaves in an appropriate manner.

Task training involves training the dog to perform the specific tasks their person needs them to. For example, psychiatric service dogs are trained to provide deep pressure therapy during times of anxiety. Environmental proofing refers to training the dog everywhere; at different times, in different weather conditions, with different types of people and chaos present, etc. Without training, reinforcing and grounding each of these components completely, the dog can experience stress and anxiety and thus struggle with their job and ability to fulfill their duties – or act as a well-mannered member of society.

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