

DEFINITIONS FOR SERVICE DOGS



Service Dogs are now noted for many different types of work. And, they are called by different names. The terminology used to label specific types of work dogs perform for people with disabilities has not been standardized. For example, a dog trained to help a person walk might be referred to by different sources as a 'mobility dog', a 'walker dog', or a 'support dog'. In addition to the wide variety of terms used, many service dogs are cross-trained to perform more than one category of work (such as guide and mobility for a person who is blind and has severe arthritis) and labeling them by the work they do becomes cumbersome.

According to the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), a service animal must be individually trained to do work or tasks of benefit to a disabled individual in order to be legally elevated from pet status to service animal status. Their basic classifications for our purposes are:

Service Dog: While the term 'service animal' is legally defined, some organizations use the term 'assistance animal' or 'assistance dog'. They provide specific assistance duties and have a legal right to accompany their handlers. Anywhere the human can go, the animal is allowed to go.

Mobility: aids with bracing and providing balance, pulling, picking objects up from floor, retrieving objects

Hearing: alerts to sounds such as doorbell, telephone, kitchen timer, smoke detector, a baby's cry; protective of danger such as traffic or wild animals; someone calling the handler's name

Medical: alerts to bodily chemical changes such as seizures, asthma, allergies, heart rhythm changes, blood sugar changes; arthritis; emotional support such as panic disorder, bipolar, PTSD, general mental confusion, nudge handler to break from a disassociation state or fear paralysis

Sight: aids the handler to navigate around objects and through traffic and crowds

Therapy Dog: goes to hospitals, nursing homes, schools and allows people to pet him, and gives comfort and aid without specific duties to one person. They are NOT service dogs. They are usually the personal pets of their handlers, and work with their handlers to provide services to others. Federal laws have no provisions for people to be accompanied by therapy animals in places of public accommodation that have "no pets" policies. Therapy animals usually are not service animals.

Companion Dog: is not legally defined, but is accepted as another term for pet.

Social/Therapy Dog: has no legal definition. They often are animals that did not complete service animal or service dog training due to health, disposition, trainability, or other factors, and are made available as pets for people who have disabilities. These animals might or might not meet the definition of service animals.

In addition to task training, it should also be recognized that housebreaking, basic obedience training and mastering the behaviors of no nuisance barking, no aggressive behavior, and no inappropriate sniffing or intrusion into another person or dog's space are an essential part of educating any dog for a career as an assistance dog.