Assistance Animals at Syracuse University

# Overview

Many people with disabilities use an assistance animal in order to fully participate in everyday life or to have an equal opportunity to enjoy and use a dwelling (e.g., apartment, home). Dogs and miniature horses can be trained to perform many important tasks to assist people with disabilities, such as providing stability for a person who has difficulty walking, picking up items for a person who uses a wheelchair, preventing a child with a disability from wandering away, or alerting a person who has hearing loss when someone is approaching from behind. Support animals that do not perform specific tasks, such as emotional support animals, provide therapeutic emotional support for individuals with disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), and the New York State Office of the Attorney General provide guidance on common questions about service animals and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and emotional support animals and the Fair Housing Act (FHA). This overview highlights key issues for the SU students and employees drawn from DOJ and HUD guidance regarding these assistance animals.

# Organization of This Guidance

* Service Animals and the ADA
* Emotional Support Animals
* Contacts and Campus Resources
* Further Resources

# Service Animals and the ADA

## Defined

Under the ADA, a service animal is defined as a dog or miniature horse that has been individually trained to do work or perform a task or take a specific action when needed to assist the individual with a disability. The task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person’s disability.

For example, a person with diabetes may have a dog that is trained to alert him when his blood sugar reaches high or low levels. A person with depression may have a dog that is trained to remind her to take her medication. Or a person who has epilepsy may have a dog that is trained to detect the onset of a seizure and then help the person remain safe during the seizure.

People with disabilities have the right to train the dog themselves and are not required to use a professional service dog training program. Students and employees do not need to seek approval from Syracuse University to bring their service animal to campus or an SU event. However, a service animal may be excluded from a sterile environment (e.g., hospital operating room).

## How can I identify a service animal?

Many service animals will wear a vest or sign indicating they are a service animal and will be effectively under the control of the handler. However, the ADA does not require service animals to wear a vest, ID tag, or specific harness. Service animals are working and should not be petted without the express permission of the handler.

In situations where it is not obvious whether the animal is a service animal, employees may ask only two specific questions:

1. Is the dog or miniature horse a service animal required because of a disability?
2. What work or task has the dog or miniature horse been trained to perform?

Employees are not allowed to request any documentation for the animal, require that the animal demonstrate its task, or inquire about the nature of the person’s disability.

## Control and care of animal

The service animal must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered while in public places unless these devices interfere with the service animal’s work or the person’s disability prevents use of these devices. In that case, the person must use voice, signal, or other effective means to maintain control of the animal at all times.

If a service animal behaves in a way that poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others, has a history of such behavior, or the animal is out of control and the handler does not take effective action to control it, the person with a disability must remove the animal from the area.

The handler is responsible for caring for and supervising the service animal, which includes toileting, feeding, grooming and veterinary care.

For further information on this topic and additional situational examples, visit: [Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA](https://archive.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.pdf).

## Allergies

If an individual in a work or school space is known to be, or it comes to be known is, allergic to animal dander, that individual or another in a supervisory role students should promptly contact the [Center for Disability Resources](mailto:disabilityresources@syr.edu) or employees should contact the [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](mailto:ada@syr.edu).

# Emotional Support Animals

## Defined

An emotional support animal (ESA) is an animal that provides emotional support to alleviate at least one identified symptom or effect of a disability. “These support animals provide companionship, relieve loneliness, and sometimes help with depression, anxiety, and certain phobias, but do not have special training to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

ESAs must be approved as a reasonable accommodation.[[2]](#footnote-2) Students, contact the CDR to request approval of an ESA. Employees, contact ODI to request approval of an ESA.

## Control and care of animals, and Allergies

Review these topics above under ‘Service Animals’.

# Contacts and Campus Resources

[Office of Diversity & Inclusion (ODI)](https://diversity.syr.edu/educational-training-programming/how-to-establish-an-affinity-group/)

* Voice: (315) 443-6162
* Email: [ada@syr.edu](mailto:ada@syr.edu)
* The Disability Access team in the ODI assists employees who need reasonable accommodations, proactively works across the campus to remove access barriers and to advance universal design and offers professional development on disability topics in collaboration with the CDR.

[Center for Disability Resources (CDR)](https://disabilityresources.syr.edu/)

* Voice: (315) 443-4498
* Email: [disabilityresources@syr.edu](mailto:disabilityresources@syr.edu)
* CDR staff assist students who need reasonable accommodations and offer professional development on disability topics in collaboration with the ODI.

# Further Resources

* ADA National Network, [Service Animals](https://adata.org/sites/adata.org/files/files/Service_Animals_final2017.pdf)
* ADA National Network, [Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals](https://adata.org/guide/service-animals-and-emotional-support-animals)

Provides an overview of service animals under the ADA, other support animals, handler rights and responsibilities in various contexts (e.g., employment, housing, education, travel).

* U.S. Department of Justice, [Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA](https://archive.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.pdf)

This is an 8-page brief addressing service animals, rights and responsibilities of the handler and the general public, and many related issues.

U.S. Department of Justice, [ADA Requirements: Service Animals](https://www.ada.gov/resources/service-animals-2010-requirements/)

This publication provides guidance on the term “service animal” and the service animal provisions in the Department’s regulations.

* Adam LeGrand, [Service Animals: From Common Myths to Future Policy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0iQrY8tDHs), (captioned)

“[SU Alumni] and Air Force veteran Adam LeGrand outlines the perceptions of service animals in the U.S., laws concerning public access, and where policy is headed. Education is key to understanding the role of service animals, how they differ from support animals or family pets and in advancing acceptance and public policy for these service animals. He also discusses K9 for Warriors, the country’s leader in service animals for disabled veterans. … Adam [is] joined by his service dog, Molly.”

* The Association of Service Animal Providers for Military Veterans, <http://servicedogs4vets.org/>

“Association of Service Dog Providers for Military Veterans is a coalition of non-profit service dog providers for military Veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, and military sexual trauma working to prevent suicide and improve military Veterans’ mental health.”

* ADA National Network, [Fact Sheets](https://adata.org/ada-fact-sheet-page#quicktabs-ada_fact_sheet=0)

Provides up-to-date links to many ADA specific topics in English and Spanish.

* New York State Office of the Attorney General, [Service Animals in Public Accommodations](https://ag.ny.gov/sites/default/files/publications/serviceanimals-english.pdf)

Defines service animal and provides examples of tasks they may perform.

* U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, [Assessing a Person’s Request to Have an Animal as a Reasonable Accommodation Under the Fair Housing Act](https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PA/documents/HUDAsstAnimalNC1-28-2020.pdf) (Jan. 28, 2020).

This HUD guidance “explains certain obligations of housing providers under the Fair Housing Act (FHA) with respect to animals that individuals with disabilities may request as reasonable accommodations.”

1. ADA National Network, [Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals](https://adata.org/guide/service-animals-and-emotional-support-animals). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Under the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, a reasonable accommodation may modify policies and include the allowance of an animal in the workplace or school environment, such as to provide emotional support. Employees may contact the approving office for further guidance. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)