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human animal bond research institute

Understanding the Difference Between Service Animals, Emotional Support Animals, Therapy Animals and Pets

Scientific research increasingly shows the benefits of companion animals for individuals, families and communities. As we incorporate these animals into our lives –for companionship, comfort, and assistance – it is important for people to understand the different classifications of companion animals. With this greater understanding, society can become more pet-friendly and more people and animals can benefit from the healing power of the human-animal bond.

SERVICE ANIMALS

Defined by Title II and Title III of the ADA, "a service animal means any dog that is individually trained to do work to perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual or other mental disability." Tasks performed can include, among other things, pulling a wheelchair, retrieving dropped items, alerting a person to a sound, reminding a person to take a medication, or pressing an elevator button. Any business or facility that serves the public generally must allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas of the facility where the public is normally allowed to go. When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, only limited inquiries are allowed.

For more information: https://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS

Emotional support animals (ESAs) are defined as animals that provide "emotional support that alleviates one or more symptoms or effects of a person's disability." Although ESAs are not covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, they have special status under the Fair Housing Act (FHA), which allows individuals with disabilities to access housing accompanied by an ESA. The FHA refers to ESAs as "support animals" and states that they are a type of assistance animal that provides therapeutic emotional support for individuals with disabilities. Recent guidance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides a set of best practices regarding the type and amount of documentation a housing provider may ask an individual with a disability to provide in support for an accommodation request for an ESA. ESAs have no special rights to access other businesses or public facilities that have "no pets" policies. ESAs can be any companion animal species, although not all animals are well-suited to travel outside the home.

For more information: Fine, Aubrey, et al. "The role of veterinarians in assisting clients identify and care for emotional support animals." Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association 254.2 (2019): 199-202
https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PA/documents/HUDAsstAnimalNC1-28-2020.pdf

THERAPY ANIMALS

Therapy animals provide affection and comfort to many people, typically in settings such as hospitals, assisted living facilities, and schools. These pets and their handlers are trained to safely interact with members of the public and enjoy doing so. Therapy animals have no special rights to access, except in those facilities where they are welcomed. They may not enter any businesses or public facilities with "no pets" policies and may only accompany their handler in the cabin of an airplane in compliance with airline-specific pet travel policies regardless of their therapy animal designation.

For more information: https://petpartners.org/learn/terminology/

PETS

Pets provide people with love, companionship, and joy. Eighty-five million U.S. households are home to at least one pet, and 98% of pet owners consider pets to be important members of the family. While they do provide scientifically-documented benefits to our health and wellness, pets are not afforded special access to public facilities or businesses. The benefits of pet ownership come with responsibilities, including commitment, investment and preparation. **For more information** about responsible pet ownership, please visit:
https://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/responsible-pet-ownership.aspx

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