



*Disclaimer: This page is for informational use only. Please note that we do not sell/provide service animals.*

If you do not personally work with a service dog, or have someone close to you who does, it can be difficult to know how to behave around them. Even well-meaning people often make faux pas when it comes to service dog etiquette and rules. Some of these errors may simply annoy service dog owners, but others may be seriously offensive or even endanger their lives. Here, we've compiled a few tips that can help the general public appropriately navigate encounters with service dogs and their handlers.

If a service dog tries to get your attention, respond.

This is one of the most important things to keep in mind. Many service dogs are trained to alert other humans in the case of an emergency. This may involve running to fetch one of their handler's family members, activating an alarm system, or even dialing 911. If they are out and about and their handler has a medical emergency, the dog may seek help from a stranger. Therefore, if a service dog approaches you and seems to be trying to convey information (barking, attempting to get you to follow, etc.), *pay attention*. The dog's handler may be in serious trouble, and you could help them.

Recently, a [story](#) that illustrates this issue went viral. Tessa Connaughton had recently been diagnosed with epilepsy, and was training her dog, Raider, to run for help whenever she had a seizure. One day Connaughton tripped and fell, and Raider – because he was not yet fully trained – mistook it for a seizure. He took off running, looking for help. Connaughton got up to find him, and wrote about what happened next in a Tumblr post:

“...I found him trying to get the attention of a very annoyed woman. She was swatting him away and telling him to go away...If it had been an emergency situation, I could have vomited and choked, I could have hit my head, I could have had so many things happen to me. We're going to update his training so if the first person doesn't cooperate, he moves on, but seriously guys. If what's-his-face could understand that Lassie wanted him



to go to the well, you can figure out that a dog in a vest proclaiming it a service dog wants you to follow him.”

Do not distract service dogs.

Remember that they are “on the job,” doing work that is critical to their handler’s health and safety. Would you be able to do your job effectively with someone patting your head or talking to you in an excitable, high-pitched voice? Probably not, and neither can a service dog. Unless a service dog handler has specifically invited you to interact with their dog, you should leave the dog alone.

Take responsibility for your children and pets.

In addition to giving service dogs the space they need, make sure that your children and pets (or any kids/animals under your care) do the same. You can explain to children that the dog is doing a very important job and needs to focus.

Know that a dog may be working even if they do not appear to be.

Even if a handler and dog appear to just be relaxing, the dog may still need to remain vigilant in case of a medical emergency. For example, some dogs are [trained to predict or respond to seizures](#).

Remember that service dog handlers do not have to answer your questions.

The function of a service dog is not always obvious. Certain handlers enjoy talking to strangers about how their dogs help them. However, many others find it invasive when people ask what their service dogs do, because you are essentially asking them to disclose medical information they may prefer to keep private. In conversations about service dogs, it is best to let the dog’s handler take the lead.



Do not question a service dog's legitimacy.

Unfortunately, people do sometimes claim their untrained pets are service dogs, knowing that they can then bring them anywhere. People also often disguise pets as emotional support animals (ESAs). After encountering or hearing about someone abusing this system, it's easy to become suspicious of all assistance animals. However, it's very important to give people the benefit of the doubt. Assuming that a service or support dog is fake is like assuming that someone with a new electronic device must have stolen it: people do bad things, but there is no logical reason to assume someone is lying without any evidence. Nobody likes being treated with unwarranted suspicion. And it is very important to remember that many disabilities are "invisible" (not immediately obvious to an observer). People with invisible disabilities who may benefit from an assistance dog include those with epilepsy, psychiatric disorders, hearing impairments, and a variety of other conditions.

Do not pretend your pet is a service or support dog.

This is related to the last point. People who do this make it harder for legitimate assistance animals to be taken seriously. They are also causing an increase in regulations that make life more difficult for people who truly need a service or support animal (click [here](#) to learn about recent changes in airline policies).

Do not pity service dogs.

Some people feel sorry for service dogs, assuming that they have to work constantly and have no time for fun. Firstly, it is important to understand that having a sense of purpose can help keep dogs from becoming bored, and their tasks provide them with mental stimulation. Second, service dogs *do* have time to relax and play! As Kea Grace explains in an [article](#) for *Anything Pawsable*,

"Please don't tell me you 'feel sorry' for my service dog because she has to work all the time. She's incredibly loved and she does in fact enjoy 'time off' so she can just be a dog. She does get treats, she does get to play and sometimes, when she's off duty, she enjoys



getting the ‘zoomies’ and running around in massive circles like she’s lost her connection to the mothership and she’s trying to re-establish the signal.”

Know that service dogs can go pretty much anywhere their handlers go.

This is a federal right protected under the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#). Moreover, if you are a business owner, you cannot require patrons to provide documentation before entering with a service dog. It is also important to realize that federal law does *not* require service dogs to wear vests in order to be admitted into facilities, and that municipal bans against certain breeds do not apply to service dogs. Business owners may request that a service dog leave only if they are out of control (which would not be typical of a well-trained service dog) and their handler is not taking appropriate measures to make them behave, or if there are other extraordinary circumstances. For more information on federal service dog legislation, click [here](#).

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*Did we miss anything important that the general public should know about service dogs and how to behave around them? Please feel free to contribute additional tips in the comments!*

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### Related Reading

- [Airline Crackdowns on Emotional Support Animals Incite Controversy](#)
  - [Service Animals for Children with Disabilities](#)
  - [Seizure Dogs](#)
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How to behave around  
**SERVICE  
DOGS**

**9 ETIQUETTE RULES**

-  **IF A SERVICE DOG TRIES TO GET YOUR ATTENTION, RESPOND.**
-  **DO NOT DISTRACT SERVICE DOGS.**
-  **WHEN YOU'RE NEAR A SERVICE DOG, TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR CHILDREN AND PETS.**
-  **REMEMBER THAT SERVICE DOG HANDLERS DO NOT HAVE TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS.**
-  **DO NOT QUESTION A SERVICE DOG'S LEGITIMACY.**
-  **KNOW THAT A DOG MAY BE WORKING EVEN IF THEY DO NOT APPEAR TO BE.**
-  **DO NOT PRETEND YOUR PET IS A SERVICE OR SUPPORT DOG.**
-  **DO NOT PITY SERVICE DOGS.**
-  **KNOW THAT SERVICE DOGS CAN ESSENTIALLY GO ANYWHERE THEIR HANDLERS GO.**





## How to Behave Around Service Dogs

