



Service Dogs, Therapy Dogs, and Emotional Support Animals

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By Rebecca Randolph

Many people confuse the terms service dog, therapy dog, and emotional support animals. However, there are a number of important differences among these three types of working animals:

Service Dogs

- Service dogs are dogs who are individually trained to do work or do specific jobs for people with disabilities.
- There are different types of service dogs: guide dogs for the blind, hearing dogs, mobility dogs, medical alert dogs, medical assistance dogs, and psychiatric service dogs.
- Service dogs do a variety of different jobs such as: pulling a wheelchair; helping a mobility-impaired person with balance, picking up things, or turning on lights; letting a person know that they are about to have a seizure or diabetic emergency; reminding a person to take medications; or calming a person who is having an anxiety attack. The work a dog has been trained to do must be directly related to the person's disability.
- Service dogs can be any breed or size. Larger dogs (Labrador Retrievers, German Shepherds, or mixed breeds) are commonly used as guide and mobility dogs, but smaller dogs can also be service dogs.
- Service dogs are very carefully trained for many months to do their jobs.
- Service dogs are allowed to go with their people to any public place, but they must behave themselves, or else they (and their people) will be asked to leave. A service dog needs to be with his person at all times.
- Service dogs are not pets. Other people should not pet, talk to, or bother a working service dog.
- A service dog must behave well in public, and his person must make sure the dog behaves well.
- Service dogs often wear special harnesses or vests with patches that identify them as service, guide, or medical alert dogs.
- Miniature horses, in addition to service dogs, are allowed by law to do work for people with disabilities.



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Therapy Dogs

- Therapy dogs visit hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and libraries so that people can pet them or spend time with them. The dogs and their people must have permission to visit these places.
- Therapy dogs must be trained to do their jobs. Some cities or counties require that therapy dogs pass the Canine Good Citizen test and a therapy dog certification test. The training for therapy dogs is not as long or as detailed as for service dogs. Therapy dogs must take a basic manners/obedience class and learn to get along with different kinds of people and behave well in different kinds of situations.
- Therapy dogs are usually pets who work with their people as volunteers in different places.
- People are encouraged to pet therapy dogs—that's a big part of these dogs' job!
- Therapy dogs often wear vests or bandannas that show people they are therapy dogs.
- Almost any animal can be a therapy animal—dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, birds, rats, hamsters.

Emotional Support Animals

- These animals' purpose is to provide comfort or emotional support to a person.
- Emotional support animals are pets with no special training.
- They are not considered service dogs.

Adapted from:

<http://woof.doggyloot.com/service-dogs-therapy-dogs-and-emotional-support-animals-%E2%80%93-important-differences/>

About Rebecca Randolph: blogger, writer, artist, and attorney, but most importantly, a dog mom. She assists her lab Garth with his blog [The World According to Garth Riley](http://www.twagr.com) (<http://www.twagr.com>). Garth is a Canine good Citizen and therapy dog certified by Therapy Dogs Incorporated (<http://www.therapydogs.com>). As members of Caring Canines, Garth and Rebecca attend special events and visit hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and libraries.