

Independence, which has been providing service dogs free of charge since the 1970s. All the dogs are bred, raised, and professionally trained to be service dogs, ensuring they're properly behaved, have the right temperament, and hopefully lead long healthy working lives.

Our service dog has changed our lives for the better. My daughter is able to conserve her energy for important tasks and she's never lonely. We take the dog everywhere, and she's made my daughter's many medical appointments and procedures far less stressful for everyone. Now that my daughter uses a wheelchair much of the time, her dog performs even more helpful tasks.



### How to approach someone with a service dog

Service dogs may be dogs, but they should also be regarded as a medical device or aid. That's why it's important to never try to pet a service dog, offer it a

treat, or call it over to you without first speaking with the handler. Even if it may not look like the dog is working, it may be providing an essential service and shouldn't be distracted.

You can, however, talk to the person who is handling the service dog. They're usually happy to talk to you about the dog and what it does for them. Remember when you're interacting with them to speak to the person and not the dog!

After speaking with them, you may ask to pet the dog, but don't be surprised or offended if they decline. When dogs are working, it's important they stay on task. It's really up to the handler whether they think it's a good idea and an appropriate time and location.

Remember, service dogs are not pets! Sure, when they're "off duty" they still get to be dogs, but when you see them with a vest or harness or in a public place you should treat them with the same respect you would treat anyone who's trying to get their work done.

Service dogs are not required to have certification or identification.

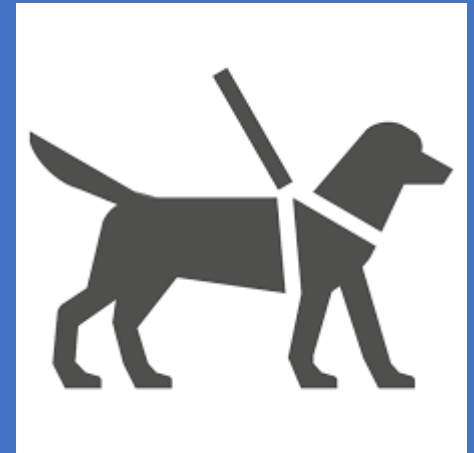
### For more information on service dogs:

To learn how ADA protects the Service Dog Team and are protected under [https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service\\_animal\\_qa.html](https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.html). More information can be found at: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/about-service-and-assistance-animals>

And, to find out more about Canine Companions for Independence, visit <http://cci.org>

*An accessible copy of this pamphlet is readily available upon request.*

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Service Dog Icon

## SERVICE DOGS

Information

Commission On Disability

Newton



## Background

Newton Commission On Disability (COD), a voluntary citizens group appointed by the Mayor, informs city leaders of the needs and priorities of residents with disabilities. Commission members are a diverse representation of Newton's disability population. Through education and advocacy, the COD works to raise disability awareness and the importance of increased accessibility to programs, housing and other facilities. Its mission is to foster equal access to community life and activities for people with disabilities. With this pamphlet on service dogs the COD hopes to raise awareness and recognition of the important role service dogs play in our community.

**Service dogs** are a more common sight these days, but many people don't really understand the many reasons someone may use a service dog, or the important rules governing their presence in public places. These working animals help individuals with a variety of disabilities live their lives more independently and provide numerous benefits to those with a legitimate need.

There are several types of service dogs. Individuals with vision loss use guide dogs and are best understood by the general public. They ensure their owners can safely navigate streets, sidewalks, public transportation, and buildings, helping their handlers avoid obstacles and vehicles while finding stairs, entrance ways, and curb cuts.

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*“My guide dogs have restored my self-assurance, and my self-reliance both necessary tools to tackle the tough road we all call life. Autumn is always by my side. My Guide, and my companion. A trust forged between us that no one but another guide dog handler can understand. We are a team, attached at the hip always. Walking in sync.”*  
-Barbara. Lischinsky, COD member

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Service dogs that assist individuals with mobility issues are also increasingly common. These dogs will retrieve and deliver items, open and close doors, and perform other tasks for people who may be physically unable to do those things or greatly benefit from the help. While these dogs are often associated with folks using mobility aids such as wheelchairs, there are plenty of people with “invisible disabilities” that rely on them as well for similar tasks and for stability.

Hearing dogs are another category of service dogs. These animals are trained to alert their handlers when they hear specific sounds, such as smoke and fire alarms, doorbells, timers, and car horns.

There are also dogs specifically trained for early detection of potentially life-threatening symptoms for people with serious medical conditions. These alert dogs can, for example, help individuals with Seizure Disorder, diabetes, and autism. They're trained to preemptively notice the onset of an episode and ensure they get their required medicines or that they're in a safe space or position to prevent any injuries to themselves or others.

Another type of service dog is for individuals with Psychiatric needs, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These dogs are able to help their handlers go out in public when they otherwise wouldn't feel comfortable doing so, as well as wake them up if they're having nightmares, apply deep pressure during upsetting situations, and create a physical separation between their handler and other members of the public.

### ADA protection

Service dogs differ from other assistance animals in some key ways. First of all, under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), individuals and their service dogs have public access rights, which means they can take them almost anywhere. Other than a few special circumstances, their access cannot be legally denied. Therapy dogs and Emotional Support

Animals (ESA) do not have the same level of protection and access rights, and for good reason. Service dogs go through extensive training to not only perform specific tasks for their handlers, but also to behave properly in public and not draw attention to themselves when they're not working.

Under the ADA, if someone attempts to enter a public place where dogs normally aren't allowed, there are only two questions that can be asked:

- Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
- What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

Unfortunately, confusion and deception have also led to a rise in service dog fraud. People will try to take their pets places by putting fake vests on them or getting phony online certificates. This makes it harder for people with legitimate reasons to use a properly trained service dog, and it creates a public health issue as these dogs aren't always well behaved and could attack other people or legitimate service dogs.

### Our Story

**COD member Matt Volpi shares this story:** Our family got a service dog for our daughter, who has a neuromuscular disease. She fatigues easily, needs to rest often, and normal everyday tasks such as bending over to pick something up off the floor are much harder for her than a typical person. Her service dog can help her with tasks such as retrieving items, helping her up the stairs, or getting up into a standing position.

And, because she has to rest often and misses out on many traditional activities that her peers participate in, she has a companion to keep her company. Service dogs also make a great ice breaker for people with disabilities, as people who may be uncomfortable approaching someone will be more likely to engage when there's a dog involved. We got our service dog from Canine Companions for