

All about Service Dogs

By: Kaylee Mescal and Chance the Service Dog

What is a service dog?

A service dog is a dog specifically trained to perform tasks to help an individual with a disability. There are multiple types of service dogs including but not limited to mobility, seizure alert, diabetic alert, and cardiac alert. They are working dogs, not pets, and should be treated with respect as they have a very important job.

Where are service dogs allowed to go and what can businesses ask?

Service dogs are allowed to go anywhere that their handler(owner) goes. Things like allergies or a fear of dogs are not valid reasons to refuse a service dog. Businesses are legally allowed to ask two questions. First is if the dog is a service animal and second what tasks the service dog is trained to do. "Certifications" or "IDs" for service dogs are NOT real things.

What are some tasks a service dog can do?

All service dogs are trained for specific things and can also be trained in different ways. While some seizure-alert dogs will bark at you to alert you to oncoming seizures, others will just stare at you and not let up or be interested in anything else. Some general commands that almost all service dogs do are heel, under, down, sit, stay, come, and many more. A heel is when the service dog walks very closely to your side. When their handler stops walking or wheeling they will as well and can anticipate it beforehand. Most service dogs are trained to heel on the left but each service dog is different. Personally my service dog, Chance, heels on the right since my left side is weak and not very predictable. Another more specific command is "button" where the service dog will either use their face or paw to hit the "push button" that opens the door. Another specific command, one that I personally use, is bark. If I start to choke my service dog will start barking and keep barking until my mom comes.

What should you not do?

You should not pet, bark at, talk to, make noises, take pictures, or do anything along these lines. Additionally do not stare. The service dog and handler are just trying to get on with their normal life, just like anybody else. Their day-to-day life might look a little different to yours but that doesn't mean they want to be stared at. If you are distracting the service dog they can miss an alert which then causes danger to their handler. If you do want to talk or ask a question, talk directly to the handler, not the service dog. Some handlers may be open to answering general questions, while others may not and that is completely okay because it is their personal business. You can help them by treating them like any other person.

What to do if a service dog comes up to you without their handler?

If a service dog comes up to you without their handler you should follow the dog. They are trying to get help for their handler. As you follow you should still not touch them as it could be a distraction and their handler needs help.

About the Author

My name is Kaylee and I am a senior in high school. I have Complex Regional Pain Syndrome, Occult Tethered cord Syndrome, Chiari Malformation, and many more diagnoses. My service dog, Chance, is a 2-year-old Bernedoodle. He is a multipurpose service dog who does seizure alert, mobility, and behavior disruption. I have had Chance for just around 9 months! Chance was trained out in Ohio at a training facility. He started training when he was eight weeks old and when he was around a year old he moved to advanced training. Although he is fully trained we still train multiple times a week and are always working on new skills. Thank you for taking time out of your day to read "All about Service Dogs"!

