

Trained Service & Emotional Support Animals



Animals can help many people with disabilities in their day-to-day activities such as: providing balance or support when standing or walking, assisting with transfers from a wheelchair to a chair/bed, opening doors, retrieving things for a person, turning lights on/off, and providing emotional support. Animals can either be trained service animals or emotional support animals. We are here to highlight the difference.

Human Rights Act

The Human Rights Act protects people with trained service animals and also emotional support animals (who may or may not have completed an accredited training program). Service providers and employers have a duty to accommodate people, up to the point of undue hardship.

Service Animal Act

The Service Animal Act says that a person can't be denied access to services, facilities or housing because they use a service animal. The animals must be trained and qualified to provide assistance to a person with a disability. This means that the service animal must have successfully completed a service animal training program accredited by one of the following:

- Assistance Dogs International
- International Guide Dog Federation
- A program approved by another province/territory in Canada.

What can you ask people with trained service animals or emotional support animals?

- You can ask for certification that the animal is properly trained. Make sure you know how to identify accredited training programs.
- If the disability is obvious (eg. a person who uses a white cane) there is no need to ask for certification or a medical note.
- If the disability is not obvious, you can ask for a medical note that says the person "requires a service or emotional support animal for reasons relating to their disability". Do not ask about the person's specific diagnosis.
- You can ask what work or task the animal has been trained to perform. This may be necessary in order to try to accommodate them to the point of undue hardship. Don't ask the person to get the animal to demonstrate its ability before you let them in.
- You can confirm that the person has "care and control of the animal". This means that the animal behaves properly in public and does not go up to or pose a safety risk to other people sharing the space.

Best Practices

- Identify barriers and consider other ways to accommodate people
- Have signs in prominent places outlining the rules
- Educate staff about the issue and the difference between trained service animals and emotional support animals
- Educate staff about your policies or procedures (eg. the duty to accommodate and how deal with situations where a person has severe allergies to or is fearful of animals)
- Take a person in good faith when they ask for an accommodation
- Train staff how to respond if difficult situations arise
- Have designated people (with more training or experience) who can provide extra support to front-line staff, if necessary

