

# Service Animal Misconceptions

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## What are some common misconceptions about service animals?

### **A service animal must wear a vest.**

Some individuals with a disability with service animals may have their animals wear vests as a way of communication with the public, but it isn't required. In fact, there is no requirement for service animals to wear any form of identification or for the owner to carry any identification proving the animal is indeed a service animal. Watch the [“Do they need a vest?” video\(link is external\)](#) which provides more information.

### **A service animal will never bark.**

While service animals are quite often better trained than most dogs who are pets, some dogs are actually trained **to** bark. For example, a diabetic alert may be trained to bark if their handler's blood sugar levels are changing.

### **An individual with a service animal can only have one animal at a time.**

Most individuals with disabilities have only one service animal, but it is not true that they are limited to only one animal. There are many reasons why individuals may have more than one animal. For example, an individual may have a mobility disability and uses a service animal to provide stability support. The same individual may also have a psychiatric service animal to provide reminders to take medications at a certain time.

### **Pit bulls and other “banned” breeds can never be service animals.**

This is absolutely false. Even in cities or other areas where some breeds are banned, a service animal may be **any** breed of dog. In fact, service animals may not be excluded due to generalized fear of the breed. There are a couple of circumstances when a service animal can be excluded, but generalized fear is not one of them. The decision to exclude a service animal must be based on actual behavior. Read more about [what the ADA says about breeds\(link is external\)](#).

### **Only Labradors or German Shepherds are service animals; all others are fakes.**

A service animal is not limited to one or two breeds of dogs. Any breed of dog can be a service animal, assuming the dog has been individually trained to assist an individual with a disability with specific tasks. Just like all dogs, service animals come in every shape and size. Some small dogs are suited for alerting their owners to changes in mood. Some large dogs are great at provided stability to those with mobility

difficulties. While some breeds may be more common than others, it is important to remember that **all** breeds of dogs can be service animals.

## **A “real” service animal is certified or registered as a service animal.**

The ADA has no requirement for service animals to be “certified”. Service animal certificates provide the individual with a disability no more rights than an individual without one. And, while there are several online registries, including official looking ones, there is no need or requirement to register.

Some local governments or universities may offer a voluntary service animal registration service, but this is not required. Some offer benefits, like reduced animal licensing fee or to alert first responders to be on the lookout for a service animal.

## **Service animals don’t have to follow local laws to license or maintain vaccination requirements.**

This is untrue. All service animals and their handlers must follow local laws to license or to keep vaccinations up to date.

## **Service animals have to complete training programs in order to be considered “real” service animals.**

The training needed for service animals to be able to perform tasks for individuals with disabilities varies, but the ADA does not require that service animals complete an official training program. Many training programs are expensive which makes it a barrier to some people.

## **A therapy dog, psychiatric service animal, and emotional support animal are all the same thing.**

Wrong. These are all different types of animals.

Therapy dogs are often pets who have received training to ensure that they behave appropriately in institutional settings such as hospitals or senior center. Therapy dogs are not trained to perform a specific task for an individual with a disability.

Emotional support animals are animals that eliminate or lessen the symptoms of an individual’s disability simply by being in their owner’s presence. Emotional support animals are not limited to dogs and these animals have not been trained to perform a specific task for their owner. Read our [Service Animal or Emotional Support Animal: What’s the Difference?](#) page to learn more.

Psychiatric service animals are trained to perform specific tasks that assist individuals with disabilities to detect the onset of psychiatric episodes and ameliorate their effects. Tasks performed by psychiatric service dogs may include reminding the handler to take

medicine, providing safety checks or room searches for persons with PTSD, interrupting self-mutilation, and removing disoriented individuals from dangerous situations.

## **Businesses are not allowed to ask an individual with a service animal any questions about the service animal.**

This is incorrect. In fact, there are two questions that a business may ask an individual with a service animal when the need for the service animal is not readily apparent. One: Is the animal required because of a disability? Two: What work or task has the animal been trained to perform? Watch this [video about the two questions\(link is external\)](#) to learn more.

## **Businesses are not allowed to exclude a service animal or ask that that it be removed.**

Businesses have the right to exclude or remove a service animal under specific conditions.

While businesses and other covered entities must modify its policies to allow a service animal to accompany an individual with a disability, it is not required to do so if it would result in a fundamental alteration or would jeopardize the safe operation of the public accommodation. One example of this is excluding a service animal from a hospital's sterile environment like an operating room.

A business may ask an individual with a disability to remove a service animal from the premises if the animal is not housebroken or if the animal is out of control and the individual does not take effective action to control it. Learn more about [removing a service animal](#).

A decision to exclude or remove a service animal cannot be based on the notion that an animal might threaten the safety of others. It also cannot be based on a business person's assumptions or bad experiences with other animals. Each service animal must be considered individually.

## **It is illegal to claim a pet is a service animal.**

Many states have laws prohibiting this, but it is different in every state. Michigan State University's Animal Legal and Historical Center has compiled [comprehensive state-by-state information\(link is external\)](#) about many different state laws related to service animals, including the fraudulent representation of a service animal.