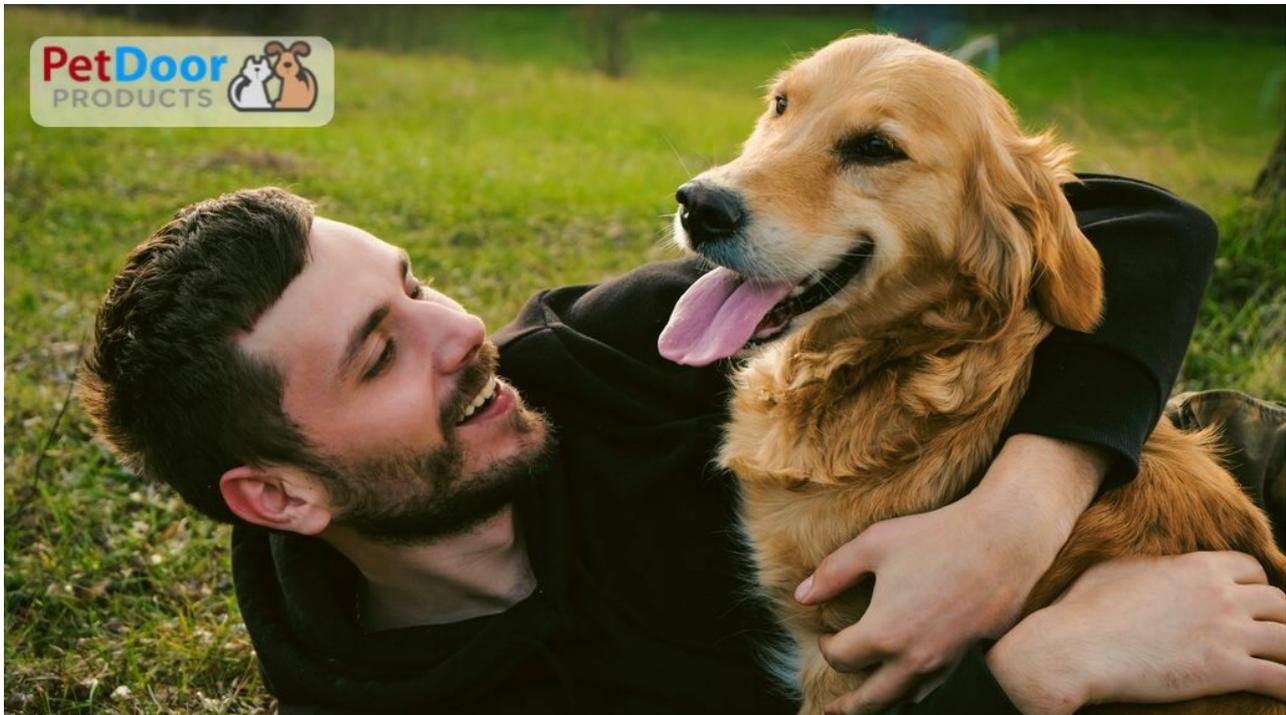


What is an Emotional Support Dog vs What is a Service Dog

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If you're living with the daily challenges of a disability, you've likely heard about both emotional support and service dogs. Understanding what service dogs do and how they differ from emotional support animals (ESAs) is essential before deciding which kind of dog is right for you. ESAs are very different from service dogs and don't always get the same kind of recognition as they do, but they also have different training requirements. Learn the facts about getting help from an animal before choosing a companion.

Service Dog Requirements

The service dog is a specifically trained animal companion that must have at least one commendable skill related to the owner's disability. For example, opening doors on command or alerting for help in response to a seizure are both trained skills that can qualify a dog as a service animal. The training can come from a professional with experience in handling service dogs or from the owner. Service dogs also need training for public handling in general since they can still be removed from a public place if they pose a safety or health risk. ***If your dog undergoes any professional training programs, keep the documents on hand as proof your canine qualifies as a service dog.***

Rights of a Service Dog

In exchange for what service dogs do, they've been granted a wide range of legal protections under the law. There is no certification or paperwork required to prove your dog is an active service dog, and anyone claiming you must have a specific license or certificate to bring a service dog into a store or into rented housing is violating the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). However, store owners and landlords can still ask if your dog has been trained to provide support to verify it qualifies as a service dog. You don't have to demonstrate the dog's training, just answer affirmatively if asked.

Emotional Support Dog Requirements

The emotional support dog requirements are much more relaxed since there is no specific designation for this kind of animal companion in the ADA. However, ESAs are generally allowed on airlines and in pet-free housing much like a service dog as long as they qualify. In most states, you'll need a letter from your doctor or therapist outlining your need for an emotional support dog. Unlike a service dog, there's no need for formal training or specific skills. Yet emotional support dogs still need housebreaking and basic socialization training since they are also open to removal from a public place if they pose a safety risk.

Rights of an Emotional Support Dog

Unless your state has laws specific to emotional support dogs, they're generally not allowed everywhere a service dog can go. Only airlines and housing tend to make exceptions for these support animals. As with service dogs, there's no specific certification or licensing needed to qualify, but general training programs can help prepare a dog for dealing with the public.

Regardless of which kind of support dog you choose, you need to know your rights regarding your animal companion. Understanding the difference between emotional support dog requirements and service dog requirements will help you choose the right type of dog for your situation.