

RISK CONTROL:

Service/Therapy Dogs in Schools

This guide shares best practices for creating a policy for on-campus service dogs and therapy dogs, which for the purpose of risk management include emotional support dogs. The policy should apply to employees, students and visitors to campus.

Defining Service Dogs vs. Therapy Dogs

- **Service dogs** are trained to perform specific tasks, such as “seeing” or opening doors, for individuals with disabilities. These tasks are covered by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).
- **Therapy dogs**, or emotional support dogs, serve as companions and can help with mood disorders and certain phobias. They are not trained to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities and are not covered by the ADA as service dogs. School districts will have their own policies regarding emotional support animals in schools.

Only Dogs Allowed

- While service animals are dogs by definition, it is recommended that schools limit therapy animals to dog breeds as well.
- Wolves, wolf-hybrids, coyotes and coyote-hybrids should not be permitted on campus.

General Tips for Schools

- Plan proactively. Meet with the student, the student’s family and the dog’s trainer before the service/therapy dog is brought to school. Determine how to educate school staff and other students about the service/therapy dog.
- Discuss concerns ahead of time. The plan should accommodate students with allergies or a fear of dogs, but these issues don’t warrant removing a service/therapy dog.
- Prioritize safety. Service/therapy dogs should have harnesses, leashes or tethers or be controlled with voice commands or signals by the student or trainer.
- Request that any displays of aggression by an on-campus dog are reported and noted.



Risk Management Best Practices for On-Campus Dogs

Health

- Owners/handlers should provide proof that all vaccinations are up to date.
- Owners/handlers should provide evidence of annual vet checks.
- It is preferred that dogs are at least 12 months old.
- Dogs should be clean, well-groomed, with no odor and free of fleas and ticks.

Training

- The following is one dog registration organization: usdogregistry.org/. Check with your state for specific requirements.
- Obtain and maintain all training certificates for service/therapy dogs. Certificates should be obtained prior to bringing the dog to school.
- Before a therapy dog is allowed on school property, the owner/handler should provide evidence that the dog is obedience trained and certified as a therapy dog.

Disposition

- Dogs should not bark or otherwise create disturbances or distractions in the educational environment.
- Service/therapy dogs should show no signs of aggression. School officials should immediately suspend privileges in the event that a dog shows signs of aggression (biting, growling, etc.). The district may suspend service/therapy dog privileges in the event of an injury but must ensure due process to employees when determining future actions related to the dog.
- All instances of injuries caused by service/therapy dogs should be documented, with copies of all training and health certificates.

Campus Visitors With Service/Therapy Dogs

- Request that the school be notified before any service or therapy dogs come onto the property.
- Be consistent: Follow the same vetting process and documentation procedure for visitors with service/therapy dogs that is used for students and employees with service/therapy dogs.
- Assign one staff member to be aware of the school policy and state laws to confirm the school policy is followed for all dogs.
- Engage the school's attorney to review the policy to ensure it follows local jurisdictional requirements.

Elements of a School Service/Therapy Dog Policy

In general, students and staff wishing to bring a service/therapy dog to school should:

- Formally request permission to bring a service/therapy dog to school
- Provide a note by a licensed physician that confirms a therapy dog is part of the treatment plan for the employee or student
- Provide evidence the therapy dog is obedience trained and certified as a therapy dog
- Acknowledge the policy and rules by signature
- Keep dogs on a leash no longer than four feet

More specifically, the policy should address the following when a request is made to have a service/therapy dog on campus:

1. Location of service/therapy dog

- Ensure access to the outdoors so the service/therapy dog can enter and exit the building without using interior hallways.
- Do not locate service/therapy dogs near an intake for the building's ventilation system or an independent system.
- Ensure location has nonporous surfaces that are easy to clean and sanitize, such as carpet-free flooring.

2. Evidence of certification for the service/therapy dog

- The certification (with training description) the service/therapy dog has received
- The credentials of the certification provider(s)
- Copies of the temperance evaluation(s) of the proposed service/therapy dog and the credentials of the temperance evaluator(s)
- Proof of current vaccinations for the service/therapy dog

3. Information about the student, employee or campus visitor using the service/therapy dog

- Name of the person(s)
- How the service/therapy dog will be used and the goals for its use
- Description of training provided to students and staff regarding the appropriate behavior around and treatment of the service/therapy dog
- Description of consequences for inappropriate treatment of the service/therapy dog

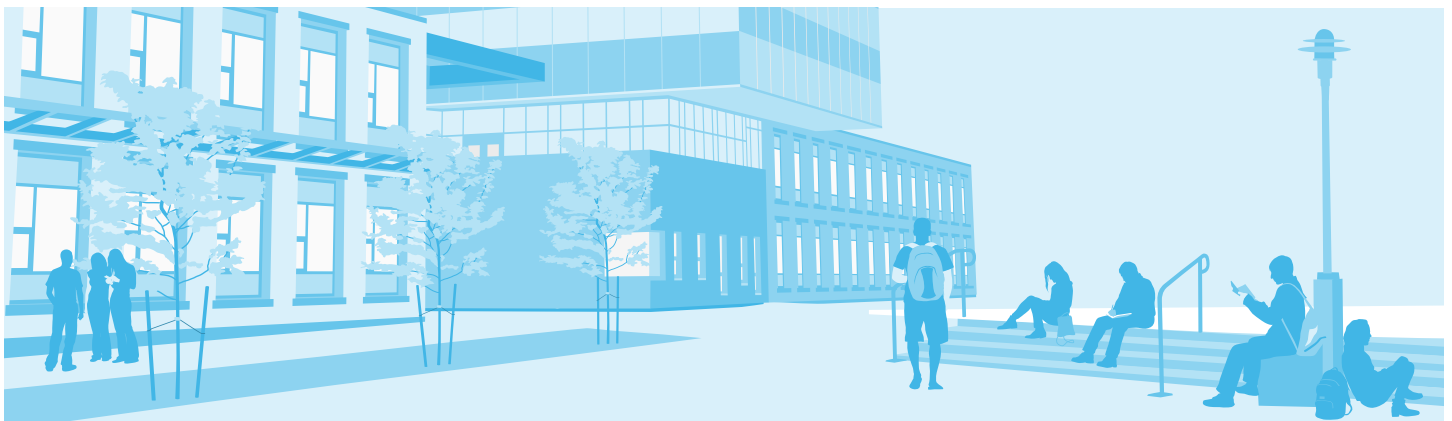
4. Details from the service/therapy dog's handler

- The name of the person(s) who will be responsible for handling the dog
- A description of the training obtained by the proposed handler(s) and the credentials of the training providers
- A schedule for the handler(s) to care for the service/therapy dog, including exercise, feeding, watering, bodily functions and any needed cleanup
- Proof of a liability insurance policy for the service/therapy dog animal while on school property

5. Circumstances under which the school principal may reject the request to bring a therapy dog on campus*

- If policy requirements aren't met
- If, in the principal's view, there is no educational benefit to be achieved based on the information contained in the request
- If the principal believes that the time needed to attend to the therapy animal is inconsistent with the assigned duties of the school employee(s) designated as the therapy animal's handler(s)
- If the request is otherwise not aligned with the needs of the school or building

*This section does not apply to service dogs covered by the ADA.



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✓ **Service and Therapy Dog Risk Control Checklist**

SCHOOL NAME:		DATE:		
NAME AND BREED OF DOG:		NAME OF OWNER/HANDLER:		
NAME AND SIGNATURE OF EVALUATOR:				
HEALTH AND DISPOSITION		YES	NO	N/A
Has owner/handler provided proof of up-to-date vaccinations?				
Has owner/handler provided proof of annual vet checkups?				
Is dog at least 12 months of age? If not, are there any concerns about its age?				
Is dog clean and well-groomed with no odor?				
Is dog free of fleas and ticks?				
Has dog shown signs of aggression?				
Does the dog have a training certificate?				
Has the dog's owner/handler received and signed a copy of your policy?				
Have the rules regarding the location of the dog been reviewed with the dog's owner/handler?				
Have the rules regarding sanitation and hygiene been reviewed with the dog's owner/handler?				

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