

Assistance Dogs - What Employers need to know about having a dog at work?

You should barely notice an Assistance dog is there, since it will have been trained to lie quietly while its owner is working, however you may need to make reasonable adjustments such as providing a safe place for the dog to lie, a place for a water bowl etc.

How should staff behave towards the dog?

The important thing to remember is that an Assistance dog is a working animal, not an ordinary pet. It expects to work with its owner and knows that when it's wearing its Jacket, it is on duty. When the dog is working, it needs to concentrate on the job in hand (or paw!), so it's very important that you don't distract it by touching, feeding or talking to it. When the dog's jacket is off, it should behave like a well-trained pet dog.

Where will the dog stay during the day?

When it's not working, an Assistance dog should rest quietly and undisturbed. The owner will provide a dog bed or blanket which should be placed in a draught-free position close to their desk or workbench. If the owner's workspace is unsuitable for a dog, for example because of industrial machinery, please contact Defence Community Dogs (DCD) to discuss suitable alternatives like providing a kennel and run.

Can we talk to the dog?

Like all dogs, Assistance dogs enjoy attention, and unless it's on duty the answer will often be "yes" – but please always ask the owner first! It's important not to overwhelm or over excite the dog, particularly when it's settling into the work environment, so please don't be offended if the owner asks you not to talk to the dog.

Can I feed the dog? Definitely not!

All Assistance dogs are fed a carefully balanced diet and extras or titbits will affect their health and the way they work. We also recommend you keep your own food – sandwiches for example – well out of temptation's way!

Can staff play with the dog?

An Assistance dog has been trained to lie quietly where it's placed, so it's a great help if you don't encourage it to run around in the workplace. It may have some toys to play with but they should not be noisy ones, and the dog won't be allowed to chase them around the work area.

When does the dog go out?

For the first few weeks, the owner may need to take the dog out for five minutes to relieve itself three or four times a day. Once the dog has settled in and is used to the routine, one or two longer breaks will normally be enough.

Where does the dog relieve itself?

The Assistance dog owner, together with their employer should identify the most suitable place nearby, which may be on the premises or off-site. The Assistance dog owner will take the dog to the relief area. Arrangements will also have been made for the disposal of waste and cleaning the area, but support from the company or individuals is always much appreciated.

Who looks after the dog?

Caring for the dog is the owner's responsibility. The dog is taken to the vet for a health check every six months and is routinely wormed and vaccinated. The owner grooms the dog regularly to keep it clean and to try to reduce the number of hairs it leaves on the carpet. The dog is fed at home, and it is the owner's responsibility to ensure that water is available at work.

What happens if the dog misbehaves?

Applying appropriate discipline is part of an Assistance dog owner's responsibility. There is no reason for you to put up with disruption caused by the dog misbehaving. If problems do occur, please discuss them with the owner, who will be keen to make sure that his or her dog isn't a nuisance.

Legislation

Each state has its own legislation. Please refer to your state's legislation for further information.

In accordance with *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) (DDA), Section 9, the legal definition of an Assistance animal as a dog or other animal that:

- (a) is accredited under a State or Territory law to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effects of disability; or
- (b) is accredited by an animal training organisation prescribed in the regulations; or
- (c) is trained to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability and meets standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.

It is unlawful under the DDA to discriminate or refuse entry or access to a public place because a person relies on an Assistance Dog (this includes Service Dog and Therapy Dogs). Assistance Dogs must accompany their handler at all times. They are not to be requested to be removed from their handler and it is deemed illegal to make such a request. Handlers and their dog have access rights to public places. These include restaurants and shops, public passenger vehicles (such as trains or taxis used to transport members of the public), healthcare facilities (including doctors and dentist surgeries) and places of accommodation (such as hotels and campgrounds).

Defence Community Dogs is an independent program that provides, at no cost, highly trained Assistance Dogs to serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) Members, who need physical and emotional support for mood, depressive and anxiety disorders; including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).



For further information on our program, please visit www.dcdogs.com.au