



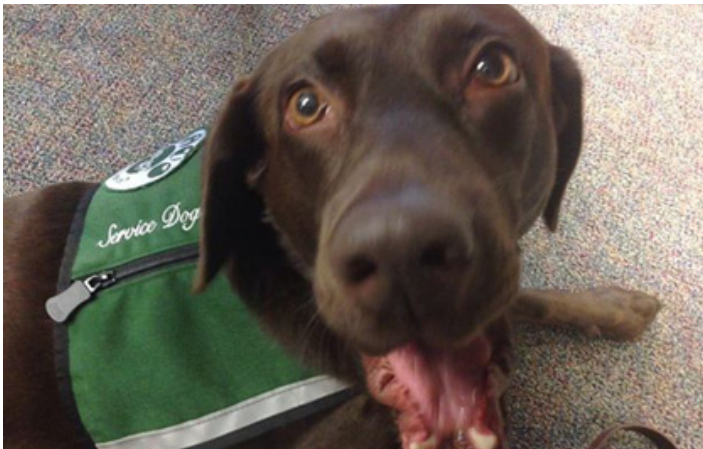
May I Pet Your Dog?

What is proper etiquette when you see a working service dog in public?

Working Service Dogs

It's certainly exciting to see a dog in a vest in a public place. Your first reaction is likely along the lines of, "What a cute dog!" and subsequently, "I want to pet him/her."

Service dogs are trained to assist their handlers, who have disabilities. The dogs come in all shapes and sizes. Furthermore, their handlers' disabilities may not be obvious. No matter the situation, these dogs need to focus on their handlers to do their jobs and keep their handlers safe. These dogs have access rights to all public places that their owners do.



What is the appropriate way to respond to a working service animal?

The best thing you can do is observe from a distance, discreetly, and not interrupt the handler.

Like you, they are probably in a rush, running an errand, and have already been stopped a dozen times because of the "cute doggie."

No matter what you do, do not distract or interrupt the working dog. Yes, the dog is very cute, but he/she has a job to do. Do not come up and pet or make noises at the dog. The dog may be performing a task, and it could be dangerous to interrupt the dog.

If the owner does not seem busy, address the owner, not the dog! The same way you would not speak to someone's wheelchair instead of the person sitting in the chair, speak to the handler and not the dog. If you ask politely, the handler may let you pet the dog and ask some questions. If not, do not be offended. It may be that the dog needs to focus, or a plethora of other possible reasons.

If they do not want to talk, try to not take it personally. These people have busy lives just like you, and probably do not want to be answering questions about their disabilities every time they go out to buy milk. It can be stressful to have to explain.

Key Summary

- Working Service dogs assist their handlers, who have disabilities. These dogs are allowed in public spaces, any place that the general public is allowed.
- Not all disabilities are visible.
- Do not distract the service animal, even just through noise and voice.
- If it seems appropriate to ask questions, talk to the handler, not the dog.
- Don't take it personally if the handler does not want to talk or let you pet the dog.
- Overall, try to not distract or interrupt the handler and dog; they're just going about their day just like you!

AIR Dogs: Paws For Minds.™ People Saving Dogs. Dogs Saving People.™

Contact AIR for More Information

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Sources: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), US Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disabilities Rights Section, Fair Housing Act (FHAct), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and ServiceDogCentral.