

Service Dog, Therapy Dog, Emotional Support Dog... What's the Difference?

What They Do

Companion Dogs are family pets that participate in various activities. They hang out with family, plus they may compete in shows and trials (like Agility, Obedience, Hunting, etc.).

Emotional Support Dogs provide their owner with companionship and can relieve loneliness. They sometimes help with depression, anxiety, and certain phobias to a specific person, but have no special training to assist a person with disabilities.

Therapy Dogs provide many people with therapeutic contact, usually in a clinical setting, to improve their physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive function. They are meant to be petted and socialized in public and go to hospitals, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, or schools/public libraries.

Service Dogs (sometimes called "Assistance Dogs") are trained to provide a specific service for a person with a disability, such as guiding an individual with impaired vision, fetching dropped items, pulling a wheelchair, or to alert on seizures. Service dogs should not be petted in public so they can focus on the service they are providing.

How do I train my dog to be a...

Companion Dog? No formal training is required; but positive, reward-based training, like a [Basic Manners](#) class, can help strengthen the bond between you and your pet. Teaching your dog basic cues and learning more about canine behavior will help you develop a trusting, respectful relationship.

Emotional Support Dog? No formal training is required. If you want to take your dog with you to various places, consider taking a group training class like a [Canine Good Citizen training program](#). Training classes can boost your dog's confidence and a CGC program will help you practice the skills your dog needs to be a model citizen when you are out and about.

Therapy Dog? Training and evaluation may be required to join individual animal-assisted therapy organizations. There are a variety of organizations that will certify a therapy dog. Most have established guidelines and protocols and require annual health certification for participating dogs. Not all dogs have the personality required to be a successful therapy dog. Dog must be comfortable being handled by new people in new environments. The Oregon Humane Society offers an [extensive training program](#) that prepares individuals and their animals to volunteer with the national organization, Pet Partners (petpartners.org).

Service Dog? Extensive training is required for the dog to learn how to provide a specific service to an individual. Most service dog training organizations focus on a specific type of service dog (ex: hearing dog, guide dog) and many individuals get a service dog through a specific organization instead of training them themselves.

The Oregon Humane Society does not offer service dog training. We encourage you to reach out to organizations on your own and ask for details about training methods and practices. We recommend trainers that use force-free, positive reinforcement based training. Learn more about how to choose a dog trainer through the **Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers** at ccpdt.org.