



Service Dog Potential

Service dogs generally receive six months to a year of schooling on tasks, obedience and public access manners. Most dogs placed by non-profits since the 1970's have been trained to assist people who have a wide variety of mobility impairments. Some teams have mastered up to fifty tasks, enjoying the challenge of such an advanced education. The list of tasks in this section are a broad sampling of what has been developed over the past quarter century to address daily living needs and safety issues.

A number of the traditional tasks listed below are proving useful to individuals with hidden disabilities such as a seizure disorder, a psychiatric disorder, a potentially life threatening medical problem or conditions which cause chronic pain. We as creative trainers are expanding the service dog concept into these additional areas providing task training so more people can benefit from the service. In some cases, a responsible third party, usually a parent or a spouse facilitates the interactions between a disabled person and his or her service dog to optimize the benefits to be obtained from including a service dog in the independent living plan of that individual.

For specific tasks to address specific symptoms of disabilities like Parkinson's Disease or MS or Epilepsy or any other disabling condition, research the subject by consulting with trainers such as ourselves that are familiar with those conditions and can focus on a particular training to provide the service / assistance dog needed.

It is our belief that service dogs are not only for the most severely impaired or end stage of a degenerative disease like MS. Someone who is considered much more moderately disabled, struggling with the difficulties of living alone, maintaining a job or raising a family could find teamwork with a highly trained service dog to be of enormous benefit in achieving the goal of remaining as self-sufficient as possible. A number of tasks enumerated in this section could empower such individuals to conserve energy, reduce or avoid pain, minimize dependency on loved ones, prevent injuries or get help in a crisis.

The recent announcement from the Centers for Disease Control on autism has hit the headlines throughout the country: New high in US autism rates inspires renewed debate; Autism Rates Jump Again; Autism is more common than previously thought. But the headlines don't offer help for parents trying to navigate the resources available to help their kids diagnosed with autism.

There is one resource that many may never think about; a dog. We are used to service dogs helping those who are visually impaired, but who would have thought that a dog could be trained to help a child on the autism spectrum cope with the repetitive motions that can take over his life? Or the night terrors that prevent him, and his parents, from getting a good night's rest? But that's exactly what these dogs can do.

While a service dog can help a child with autism gain success and independence, we as trainers say there are hurdles. Many people with autism, especially children, may not be able to function as the dog's handler. That would require the dog to be double-leashed. The child is tethered around his waist and the adult holds the leash attached to the dog's collar. Dogs go everywhere with their child, including schools.

In the ever-increasing emphasis on autism detection, diagnosis and support across the nation, most attention has been directed to the development of services for children and infants. While these tremendously valuable advances can greatly improve the early development of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders,

many adults living with ASDs were born prior to federal mandates for standardized support programs and have received little to no personalized support.

RETRIEVE BASED TASKS

- Bring portable phone to any room in house
- Bring in groceries - up to ten canvas bags
- Unload suitable grocery items from canvas sacks
- Fetch a beverage from a refrigerator or cupboard
- Fetch food bowl(s)
- Pick up dropped items like coins, keys etc., in any location
- Bring clothes, shoes, or slippers laid out to assist with dressing
- Unload towels, other items from dryer
- Retrieve purse from hall, desk, dresser or back of van
- Assist to tidy house or yard - pickup, carry, deposit designated items
- Fetch basket with medication and/or beverage from cupboard
- Seek & find teamwork - direct the dog with hand signals, vocal cues to: retrieve an unfamiliar object out of partner's reach, locate TV remote control, select one of several VCR tapes atop TV cabinet, other surfaces
- Remove VCR tape from machine after eject button pushed
- Use target stick to retrieve an indicated item off shelves in stores retrieve one pair of shoes from a dozen in closet
- Use laser pointer to target an item to be retrieved
- Drag Cane from its customary location to another room
- Pick up and return cane if falls off back of wheelchair
- Pickup or fetch crutches from customary location
- Drag walker back to partner
- Fetch wheelchair when out of reach

CARRYING BASED TASKS (non retrieval)

- Move bucket from one location to another, indoors & outdoors
- Lug a basket of items around the house
- Transport items downstairs or upstairs to a specific location
- Carry item(s) from the partner to a care-giver or family member in another room
- Send the dog to obtain food or other item from a care-giver and return with it.
- Dog carries a prearranged object to care-giver as a signal help is needed
- Carry items following a partner using a walker, other mobility aids
- Pay for purchases at high counters
- Transfer merchandise in bag from a clerk to a wheelchair user's lap
- Carry mail or newspaper into the house

DEPOSIT BASED TASKS

- Put trash, junk mail into a wastebasket or garbage can
- Deposit empty soda pop can or plastic bottle into recycling bin
- Assist partner to load clothing into top loading washing machine
- Dirty food bowl [dog's] - put into kitchen sink
- Put silverware, non-breakable dishes, plastic glasses in sink
- Deliver items to "closet" [use a floor marker to indicate drop location]
- Deposit dog toys into designated container
- Put prescription bag, mail, other items on counter top

TUG BASED TASKS

- Open cupboard doors with attached strap
- Open drawers via strap
- Open refrigerator door with a strap or suction cup device
- Open interior doors via a strap with device to turn knob
- Answer doorbell and open front door with strap attached to lever handle
- Open or close sliding glass door with a strap or other tug devices
- Shut restroom door that opens outward via a leash tied to doorknob
- Close stall door that opens outward in restroom by delivering end of the leash to partner
- Shut interior home, office doors that open outward
- Shut motel room exterior door that opens inward
- Assist to remove shoes, slippers, sandals
- Tug socks off without biting down on foot
- Remove slacks, sweater, coat
- Drag heavy coat, other items to closet
- Drag laundry basket through house with a strap
- Drag bedding to the washing machine
- Wrestle duffle bag or other objects from the van into the house
- Pull a drapery cord to open or close drapes
- Assist to close motel room drapes by tugging on edge near bottom of drape, backing up
- Operate rope device that lifts blanket and sheet or re-covers disabled person when he or she becomes too hot or cold.
- Alternatively, take edge of a blanket and move backwards, tugging to remove it or assist someone to pull the blanket up to their chin if cold
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NOSE NUDGE BASED TASKS

- Cupboard door or drawers - nudge shut
- Dryer door - hard nudge

- Stove drawer - push it shut
- Dishwasher door - put muzzle under open door, flip to shut
- Refrigerator & freezer door - close with nudge
- Call 911 on K-9 rescue phone - push the button
- Operate button or push plate on electric commercial doors
- Turn on light switches
- Push floor pedal device to turn on lamp
- Turn on metal based lamps with touch-lamp device installed - nudge base
- Assist wheelchair user to regain sitting position if slumped over
- Help put paralyzed arm back onto the armrest of wheelchair
- Return paralyzed foot to the foot board of a wheelchair if it is dislodged

PAWING BASED TASKS (some dogs prefer it to nose nudge)

- Cupboard door - shut it with one paw
- Dryer door - shut it with one paw
- Refrigerator & freezer door - one forepaw or both
- Call 911 on K-9 rescue phone - hit button with one paw
- Operate light switch on wall - jump up, paw the switch
- Depress floor pedal device to turn on appliance(s) or lamp
- Jump up to paw elevator button [steady dog if he tries it on slippery tile floor]
- Operate push plate on electric commercial doors
- Close heavy front door, other doors - jump up, use both forepaws

BRACING BASED TASKS (no harness)

- Transfer assistance from wheelchair to bed, toilet, bathtub or van seat - hold Stand Stay position, then brace on command, enabling partner to keep their balance during transfer
- Assist to walk step by step, brace between each step, from wheelchair to nearby seat
- Position self and brace to help partner catch balance after partner rises from a couch or other seats in a home or public setting
- Prevent fall by bracing on command if the partner needs help recovering balance.
- Steady partner getting in or out of the bathtub
- Assist partner to turn over in bed; have appropriate backup plan
- Pull up partner with a strap [tug of war style] from floor to feet on command, then brace till partner catches balance
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HARNESS BASED TASKS - Mobility Assistance

(Only appropriate for large sturdy adult dogs with sound joints, proper training)

- Assist moving wheelchair on flat [partner holds onto harness pull strap] avoiding obstacles
- Work cooperatively with partner to get the wheelchair up a curb cut or mild incline; handler does as much of the work as possible, never asking the dog to attempt an incline unaided

- Haul open heavy door, holding it ajar using six foot lead attached to back of harness, other end of lead attached to door handle or to a suction cup device on a glass door
- Tow ambulatory partner up inclines [harness with rigid handle or pull strap may be used]
- Brace on command to prevent ambulatory partner from stumbling [rigid handle]
- Help ambulatory partner to climb stairs, pulling then bracing on each step [rigid handle or harness with pull strap may be used to assist partner to mount a step or catch balance]
- Pull partner out of aisle seat on plane, then brace until partner catches balance [harness with a rigid handle and a pull strap, or pull strap only]
- Brace, counter balance work too, assisting ambulatory partner to walk; the partner pushes down on the rigid handle as if it were a cane, after giving warning command, when needed
- Help ambulatory partner to walk short distance, brace between each step [rigid handle]
- Transport textbooks, business supplies or other items up to 50 lbs. in a wagon or collapsible cart, weight limit depends on dog's size, physical fitness, type of cart, kind of terrain
- Backpacking - customary weight limit is 15% of the dog's total body weight; 10% if a dog performing another task, such as wheelchair pulling in addition to backpacking; total weight includes harness (average 3 - 4 lbs.). Load must be evenly distributed to prevent chafing.
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OTHER KINDS OF ASSISTANCE IN CRISIS

- Bark for help on command
- Find the care-giver on command, lead back to location of disabled partner
- Put forepaws in lap of wheelchair user, hold that upright position so wheelchair user can access medication or cell phone or other items in the backpack
- Wake up partner if smoke alarm goes off, assist to nearest exit

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TASKS

- Operate push button device to call 911, an ambulance service or another person to help in a crisis; let emergency personnel into home and lead to partner's location
- Fetch insulin kit, respiratory assist device or medication from customary place during a medical crisis
- Lie down on partner's chest to produce a cough, enabling patient to breath, when suction machine and/or care-giver unavailable
- Enrich the lives of people with disabilities by the training and placement of service dogs to provide individuals with companionship and promote independent living
- Educate the public to accept the use of service dogs in public places.
- Assist with animal rescue whenever possible by obtaining many of our animals from shelters and rescue groups