



All Dawgs Training Services

"All Dawgs Trains Good Dogs!"

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Guidelines for Selecting a Shelter/Rescue Dog for Service Dog Work

Many people need service dogs – and they wish to adopt a shelter or rescue dog to train as their service dog. We have compiled these highlights for selecting a shelter or rescue dog to serve as your service dog but please note that this is not an exhaustive list for dog selection for service dog work. Here are our tips on what to select for and what to avoid:

Potential Service Dog Traits:

Some breeds (or mixes) may be a better fit than others for certain tasks an individual needs. For example, retriever or retriever mixes may be a better fit for individuals that need objects picked up off the ground and returns to them.

Grooming Requirements:

Remember, the dogs will need care as they do their service dog jobs – including grooming. Dogs with heavy, thick coats are harder to maintain than shorter coats. You want your service dog to always be clean and tidy as they will be out in public. The longer and thicker the coat, the more the individual will need to groom, which may be difficult based on their disability.

What to Avoid in Selecting a Potential Service Dog:

- The pitiful puppy – dogs that cower in the back of their kennel or run may be shy and/or not very people focused. Shy dogs may be sound sensitive or not able to perform the needed tasks when put in a public setting.
- Dogs that will NOT make eye contact. Look at the dog using gentle eyes and see if the dog will look back. Dogs that will not make eye contact are not very people motivated and will not make good service dogs (since their whole job will be assisting people!)
- The energetic dog. Dogs with more than moderate energy may become bored and find their own ways to relieve that boredom! Instead, look for the dog that has some energy but can settle easily.
- The cute dog. Do NOT base your selection solely on looks. Your service dog will need to perform serious tasks for you. Select the dog based on these tasks you need him to perform for you.

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How to Test Potential Service Dogs

When you have a potential service dog selected from the shelter, ask the shelter staff to let you meet that dog. If you are selecting a dog from a rescue, meet the dog at the foster owner's home, if possible. You want to test the dog after at least three days in the shelter/foster home to allow the dog a little time to settle into the environment. You want to test the dog on multiple days to see if you get similar reactions. If you do not, you may want to reconsider selecting that particular dog.

- Have the shelter staff bring the dog into the meeting room. Sit quietly in a chair. Does the dog come towards you and initiate contact? You want a dog that wants to be with people without being asked.
- If you are able, get up and walk around the space. Does the dog naturally want to be with people by following you?
- Put an empty plastic bottle on the ground. Is the dog scared of it? Ignore it? Investigate it? You want a dog that is curious about other things if you need the dog to pick up objects for you. Dogs that are not scared but are not curious about new items in their environment may be better suited to emotional support dog work instead of service dog work.
- Take a tug toy or something to play with your potential service dog. A dog that will play with you is more interested in your "games" and may be more trainable for the tasks you need the dog to perform.
- Drop a book or something else that will "thud" on the floor. Dogs, just like people, can startle. You are looking to see how the dog responds after being startled. If a dog melts into the floor or otherwise cannot move and recover after a couple of seconds, the dog may not be able to overcome real-life noisy situations.
- Feed the dog. Put a high value food, such as wet dog food, in a bowl and allow the dog to start eating. Take a broom and sweep around the dog and bowl. Does the dog eat faster or growl? Any of these may indicate resource guarding towards food which would rule the dog OUT of being a service dog.

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