

ADUK QUICK GUIDE



Welcoming Customers with Assistance Dogs

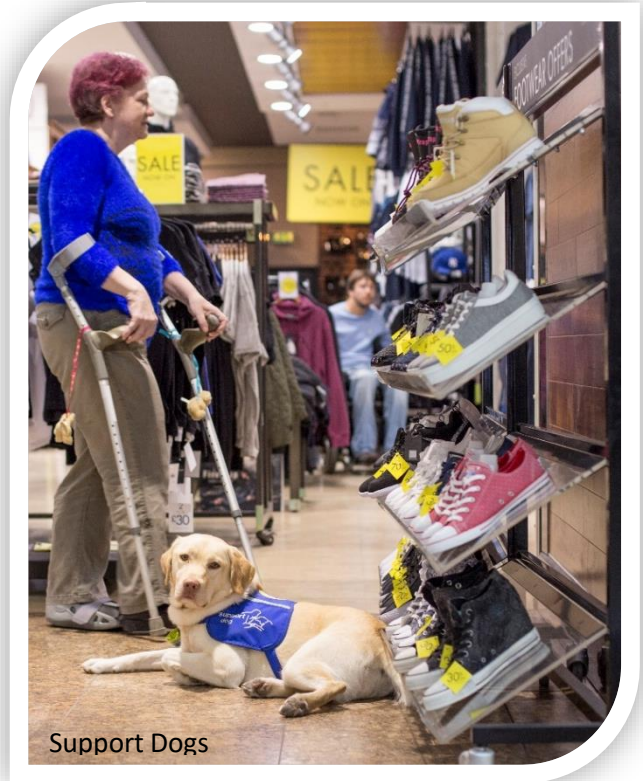
www.assistancedogs.org.uk | Registered Charity 1119538

Assistance Dogs UK

Assistance Dogs UK is a coalition of assistance dog charities that have been accredited by one of the two leading global authorities in the assistance dog industry, namely Assistance Dogs International and The International Guide Dog Federation.

Assistance dogs are dogs that have been highly trained to carry out a range of tasks and alerts that support a disabled person or person with a long-term medical condition.

Examples include a guide dog that guides a visually impaired person, a medical alert dog that alerts a person to an oncoming medical episode, an assistance dog that alerts someone with a psychiatric condition to take medication.



The Law

In the UK disabled people have important rights under the Equality Act 2010 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Northern Ireland).

It is unlawful for service providers and businesses, regardless of their size, to treat disabled people less favourably, e.g. refusing a service or offering a lesser service because a disabled person has an assistance dog.

In the context of the law, when it comes to providing access, a highly trained assistance dog should be treated as an auxiliary aid e.g. wheelchair or white cane, rather than as a pet dog.

It is important to remember that not every person with an assistance dog has a visible disability and not all assistance dogs will look the same.

Reasonable Adjustments

The Equality Act 2010 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Northern Ireland) state that service providers must make reasonable adjustments for disabled people so that they can access their venue, goods, and services.

Except for in the most exceptional circumstance e.g. a surgical or disease control hospital ward, reasonable adjustment would mean allowing access to a disabled person with their highly trained assistance dog, even if a business or venue does not normally accept pet dogs.



Staff and Volunteer Allergies and Phobias

To ensure equitable access to venues and services, it is good practice to discuss potential barriers that may prevent staff and volunteers from giving the best service they can to disabled customers or visitors with assistance dogs.

Allergy to dogs is sometimes given as a reason to not admit assistance dogs. While the prevalence of allergies generally is increasing worldwide, in the UK it is estimated that only 8% of adults are sensitive to dog allergens.

Where a clear allergy risk to a specific individual is identified by an employer, steps should be taken to reduce this risk, but a refusal of access for assistance dogs based on the possibility that other people 'may' be allergic is unlikely to be classed as a justifiable response.

Disabled people should not bear the cost of any additional cleaning or staffing that would result in reducing risk.

Refusing access to an assistance dog user due to fear of dogs amongst staff or customers is unlikely to be considered a justifiable response.

Businesses That Sell and Serve Food

Highly trained assistance dogs are recognised by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, who state that highly trained assistance dogs should be allowed access to restaurants, food retailers and other premises where food is available.

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health have declared that the very specific training and health tests that assistance dogs trained by ADUK members go through, means they are unlikely to be a risk to hygiene in these premises.

There is no conflict with food hygiene laws in allowing access for highly trained assistance dogs. As such, disabled people with assistance dogs should not have their access restricted by being expected to sit in pet friendly areas or outside seating areas. By restricting the choice of the disabled person, you would be offering a less favourable service.



Retail and Venue Based Businesses and Attractions

Like all service providers, retailers and venue based businesses must make reasonable adjustments for disabled people who rely on an assistance dog.

Other than in exceptional circumstances this means allowing access even if they don't normally allow pet dogs.

It is understandable that some venue based businesses or tourist attractions may have safety concerns. Customers and visitors with assistance dogs should be considered when carrying out regular risk assessments, so that staff and volunteers understand how they can minimise any risks in order to give access.

What to Expect

Assistance dogs should have been prepared and trained in a variety of environments so that they are capable and confident when out and about. An assistance dog is highly trained so will not pose a public nuisance.

Not all assistance dogs are trained by an ADUK member charity, but all assistance dogs should be **highly trained** by whoever does train them, whether that be a non-accredited charity, a professional trainer or individual.

Service Providers can be confident that highly trained assistance dogs from one of ADUK's member organisations will

- be trained to behave well in public
- have safe and reliable temperaments
- be healthy and do not constitute a hygiene risk
- be fully toilet-trained
- be recognisable by the harness, organisation-specific coat, lead slip or ID (though this is not a legal requirement)



Unexpected Behaviour

No assistance dog, no matter how highly trained and experienced is going to be perfect 100% of the time. Whilst they are trained to focus on their partner, from time to time they may be distracted. However, there are some behaviours that you would not expect to see such as

- dogs that have been not trained to behave well in public e.g. barking, lunging, or jumping up or pulling strongly on a lead
- dogs with aggressive or very fearful temperaments e.g. cowering or showing aggression
- poorly cared for dogs that constitute a hygiene risk or
- dogs that are not toilet trained

Identifying Assistance Dogs

Although most assistance dogs are recognisable by their jacket, harness, lead slip or bandana there is no legal requirement for them to wear these. Some people may choose not to use these visual cues and legally, they are within their rights.

This lack of visible identification can create challenges for service providers in easily distinguishing assistance dogs from pet dogs. Regrettably, some individuals may use this to falsely claim that their pet dogs are assistance dogs.

ADUK recommends treating each person as an individual and if they assert that they are disabled and that their dog is a highly trained assistance dog, and the dog behaves as expected, it may be unlawful to deny them access. If it becomes evident that the dog is not behaving in line with the list of expected behaviours outlined by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, refusing, or revoking access may be justifiable.



‘Proof’

People with assistance dogs trained by an ADUK member organisation are issued with an ADUK ID Booklet containing details about the dog and the charity that trained it. Some may use the Assistance Dogs International App on their phone to show that the organisation that trained their dog is accredited.

Not all disabled people who rely on an assistance dog will have trained their assistance dog through a charity so may not carry a specific ID, nor are they required to by law.

There is no official registration or certification process for assistance dogs in the UK so there is no legal ‘proof’ that you can ask for from someone who is accompanied by an assistance dog.

Assistance Dogs in Training

In order to prepare a dog for life working as an assistance dog, it's vital that they are exposed to a range of different environments and situations. To do this, many charities rely on the good will of service providers to allow them access.

Assistance Dogs in training are not referenced in the relevant legislation and as such it is ADUK's understanding that service providers are not legally obliged to give access to someone with an assistance dog in training in the same way that they would do a disabled person with a highly trained assistance dog.

ADUK members can take up to 2 years to prepare and train an assistance dog. Whilst there is nothing in the law about the age a highly trained assistance dog must be, it would be unlikely that a dog under a year old would be adequately prepared for the role.



Emotional Support Dogs

An assistance dog is a highly trained dog that is prepared and trained to carry out tasks and alerts to mitigate a person's disabilities or life threatening health condition. An emotional support dog is a dog that offers comfort and companionship by being present, which requires no specialist training.

Emotional support dogs are not referenced in law, so it is ADUK's understanding that service providers are not legally obliged to allow access to someone with an emotional support dog.

Emotional support dogs and highly trained psychiatric assistance dogs are not the same thing. A disabled person who relies on a highly trained assistance dog to mitigate a mental health condition should be given access to good and services.

Additional Sources of Information

For more details about welcoming disabled people who rely on assistance dogs see The Equality and Human Rights Commission's [Assistance dogs: a guide for all businesses](#).

Other ADUK Quick Guides and Resources.

- Welcoming Guests with Assistance Dogs in Holiday Accommodation
- Welcoming Employees with Assistance Dogs in the Workplace
- Welcoming Tenants with Assistance Dogs in Rented Accommodation
- Welcoming Assistance Dogs in Schools
- Welcoming Students with Assistance Dogs in Further & Higher Education
- ADUK Member Trained Dogs Poster
- 'What is an Assistance Dog' Animation
- 'Service Providers & Employers Guide to Assistance Dogs' Animation

Find out more about ADUK, its members and watch our animation at www.assistedogs.org.uk



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