



Whether you have your own dog or considering adopting a dog with the intention that you will train it to be a Service Dog, the information outlined below will give you a better idea if the dog is a suitable prospect.

- Take the dog out of its normal environment, to someplace new, like a noisy, crowded outdoor mall or park to observe the dog's behavior. Service Dogs have to be comfortable in new places and crowded conditions, so this should give you a good idea on how the dog will act.
- Ride in a vehicle with the dog. You want the dog to be happy. Lip-licking could indicate that the dog is feeling stressed or carsick. Also, a dog that vomits in the car can be a problem that may be difficult to fix. You don't want a Service Dog that vomits every time you take it out.
- Pet the dog all over its body. You should be able to touch it anywhere and have it accept being hugged by you in a strange place. Make sure to handle the dog's face. Service Dogs need to be comfortable about being touched by strangers. You never know when a child or adult might run up to your Service Dog and pull its tail, get close to its face, or hug it before you are prepared for the encounter. The dog must tolerate this without any signs of resentment. Don't assume that under normal circumstances that this is not an issue, because if startled you don't want your dog to be aggressive or resent being handled.
- Sit down in a busy area and offer the dog a treat. The dog should eat the treat and look to you for more. Taking food is a good indicator that the dog is not too stressed in the environment.
- Try teaching the dog a simple trick with treats that can be done in one session, like shaking hands, or looking at your face. The dog should be willing to try something new in a strange place. You need a dog that is willing to engage in being trained and is comfortable being trained in strange places. Training a Service Dog requires it be done out in public.
- Drop a can with coins in it on the pavement a few feet behind the dog. It's ok if the dog startles some, but it should recover quickly. You don't want a dog that acts as if it hasn't noticed the can at all or one that is nervous. There should be some response from the dog even if it is a brief glance behind.
- Take an umbrella, face the dog and open it quickly. Set the umbrella on the ground. The dog can startle a little but should calm quickly and perhaps sniff the umbrella. Again, you don't want a dog that acts as if nothing has happened at all or is nervous. There should be some response. A dog that is shutting down may not respond at all.
- When you are sure of your dog's behavior with strangers, have a few different people pet the dog and give them a treat. Don't have people bend over the dog or reach for their face. It is best to approach the dog from the side and not startle it. Before asking strangers to approach your dog, make sure your dog is calm and not fearful. If the dog shows any indication of being uncomfortable don't let a stranger approach the dog. The dog should be willing to engage the people for petting and take the treat, but should not show any signs of aggression or

avoidance. A little boisterous behavior is ok, but don't let the dog jump on people and should be easily calmed. Keep an eye out for any signs of nervousness, such as excessive lip-licking, tail tucking, or whale eyes. You want a steady, brave, unflappable dog for a Service Dog.

- You might also try going to a pet store. It's okay for the dog to get a little excited and check things out. Watch for a tendency to want to mark with urine or potty in the store. This may be a tough habit to break and you won't be able to do any public access work until it is fixed. Don't assume that because a dog is intact that neutering will fix the problem. This exercise should give you an idea of how the dog handles in a store environment.
- You need to know how the dog acts in its own home. Is it housebroken? If there has been difficulty housebreaking the adult dog, it may not be cut out for Service Dog work. Your Service Dog must be reliably housebroken without any marking issues.
- See if you can easily take toys or food from the dog. Take a high-value item and then give it back to the dog. Be careful of a dog with resource guarding issues.

If your dog can pass these exercises, then it is probably a good service dog prospect with a steady, trainable disposition.

*Adapted from an article by Tracey Martin*