

Emotional Support Animals and Therapy Animals are Different? What Does this Mean for the SANE and the Patient?

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Objectives

- Recognize how survivors with disabilities utilize emotional support animals and therapy animals;
- Analyze the legal framework for emotional support animals and therapy animals;
- Explore the benefits and complexities that may be present when working with emotional support animals and therapy animals.

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Poll

My agency/organization has engaged therapy animals to work with patients that we provide care to:

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

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Background

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Limited research on survivors with disabilities

- People with disabilities are 3 times more likely to be victims of violent crimes. (Smith, Harrell, and Judy, 2017)
- People with intellectual disabilities — women and men — are the victims of sexual assaults at rates more than 7x those for people without disabilities.
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistic, National Crime Victimization survey, Special Tabulation
Credit: Kate Park/NPR
- In 2008, intimate partners perpetrated 27% of violent crime against women with disabilities and 1.1% of crime against men with disabilities.
Source: Crimes Against People with Disabilities, Bureau of Justice Statistics

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Emotional Support Animals (ESA)

- An emotional support animal (ESA) is a type of assistance animal that is recognized as a "reasonable accommodation" for a person with a disability under the federal Fair Housing Act.
- Term applicable *only* in housing or commercial airline (Air Carrier Access Act) contexts.
- ESAs provide comfort and emotional support to their human companion, but do not generally perform tasks.

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Different than Service Animals

- Can be broader than just dogs (or miniature horses).
- Not specifically trained to perform tasks.
- Only viewed as a reasonable accommodation for housing. *No legal right to access to places of public accommodation.*

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Landlord obligations

- The FHA puts obligations on landlords regarding ESAs:
 - Must allow ESAs as reasonable accommodations, even in pet free properties
 - Must consider only two questions: 1) does the person have a disability and 2) does the animal provide assistance or emotional support that alleviates one or more of the identified symptoms or effects of the person's existing disability?
 - Cannot charge pet fees/security deposits

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Types of therapy dog interactions

- **Therapeutic visitation:** household pets whose owners take them to hospitals, nursing homes, and other facilities to brighten the days of patients and residents.
- **Animal assisted therapy:** animals that assist physical and occupational therapists, usually in rehab facilities, to help patients meet their rehab goals.
- **Facility therapy:** animals that work largely in nursing home and act as "resident pets," living on-property and handled by staff.

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Requirements for therapy animals

- Therapy animals must be registered – pass a behavioral test
- Certification
- Must be even-tempered and well socialized
- Usually low-shedding animals are preferred

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Benefits of therapy animals

- Interactions with therapy dogs can increase oxytocin (chemicals responsible for bonding) and dopamine (chemicals responsible for happiness) levels while lowering levels of cortisol (the chemical responsible for stress). (Bekoff, 2015)
- Research from the Mayo Clinic found that therapy animals can significantly reduce pain, anxiety, depression and fatigue in people.
- One study found patients' fear of medical treatment reduced 37% after brief session of animal assisted therapy. (Banks and Banks, 2002).

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Allergies

- Engaging with a therapy animal should be completely voluntary for patients and service users
- Compartmentalize spaces – have “animal rooms” or “animal free rooms”
- Maintain cleaning standards to ensure sanitation after an animal is in a room
- Disclose use of therapy animals to patients, if an allergy is identified, discuss how to mitigate

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Liability

- Liability: most reputable therapy dog accreditation agencies offer liability insurance for the animal and handler
- The handler should have proof of liability insurance
- Proof of vaccination history

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Ensuring comfort of staff

- Train staff on your facility’s policies – have distinct policies for:
 - Service animals – *always* allowed access under the Americans with Disabilities Act
 - Emotional support animals – not guaranteed access in non-residential settings, but best practice is to allow with guidance (guaranteed access in FHA-regulated spaces)
 - Therapy animals – allowed access at the discretion of the facility

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