

Assistance Dog Etiquette

Great Plains Foundation receives many questions as to how to behave around a working assistance dog. This article is written to answer some of those questions as well as some legal questions. It is important to remember that laws vary from state to state and if there are specific legal questions we advise you to contact your state attorney general, bar association or local association for people with disabilities. Feel free to contact us for assistance as well. We will provide information for individuals paired with assistance dogs who have access problems as well as provide information on how to approach a person with an assistance dog. We will also include tips for the person with the assistance dog in introducing him to the public. These tips are from people who have owned dogs and will help protect your privacy and the dog from too much attention from the general public.

The Americans With Disabilities Act guarantees a blind, deaf, or physically challenged person the legal right to be accompanied by a service animal in all areas open to the general public. Service animal means any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including but not limited to guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals with impaired hearing to intruders or sounds, providing minimal protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair or fetching items.

We offer the following tips when meeting or approaching a working assistance dog and his/her partner:

Relax, these dogs are carefully tested and selected for appropriate temperament. They have been professionally trained to have excellent manners. They are clean and should not bite, vomit or relieve themselves on your floor or furniture. Do not touch the working assistance dog as this is a distraction and may prevent the dog from doing his job for his human partner.

- **Never feed the dog**; it may be on a special diet. These animals are generally on a feeding schedule as well. Food is the ultimate distraction to the working dog and can jeopardize the working assistance dog team.
- **Speak to the dog owner and not the assistance dog**. Most owners do not mind talking about assistance dogs and their dog specifically if they have the time.
- **Do not whistle or make sounds to the dog** as this again may provide a dangerous distraction.
- **Offer assistance** (if you feel obliged) and wait for a response.
- **Never make assumptions** about the individual's intelligence, feelings or capabilities.
- **Be aware** of potential architectural barriers to the individual. Be respectful of the assistance dog team. They are a working pair going about their daily lives.

If you are interested in or require additional information please contact our office. We have available legal rights access information by state. Please email info@greatplainsdogs.com

for more information.

A Note to Business Owners

Some customers and employees may be anxious or nervous about the assistance dog in your establishment. Furthermore, they may request that the animal be removed. Reassure that person that the dog is thoroughly trained and has a legal right to be there under the ADA explained within this article. Politely inform the person that there can be large fines should the dog be denied access. It is important for you to remember that there are more than 1.6 million people who are deaf or profoundly hearing impaired, 3.5 million people with disabilities involving lack of mobility, 5.5 million people with blindness or serious vision impairments as well as many more who have seizure disorders. These people are paying customers who deserve the same respect as any other paying customer does. **For additional legal information for North Dakota Business Owners - [Click here](#)**