**What's the difference between a service dog, therapy dog, emotional support animal?**

Therapist explains rules and regulations for each.

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Whether you suffer from a disability or need some emotional support, dogs can have an incredibly beneficial impact on the health of their human companions, but it's important to keep in mind there is a difference between service dogs, therapy dogs, emotional support animals and companion dogs. Jodi Gies-Crowder, a licensed professional counselor, explained the differences between these animals and what the laws say at a Rotary Club meeting Wednesday (note: 07/25/18).

She prefaced her presentation, stating that while she does have therapy dogs for her work, she is not an expert in all these areas of animals.

A companion dog is essentially a pet and is used for company. While it may have passed a series of basic obedience tests, it is not specially trained to aid people with disabilities, as a service dog is.

Therapy dogs provide emotional support and comfort to many people and need to tolerate a wide variety of experiences, environments and people. They are trained to provide love and comfort to people in long-term care, hospitals, retirement homes, schools, mental health institutions, etc.

Gies-Crowder spoke about recognized therapy dog certification organizations, the most well-known being Alliance of Therapy Dogs (formerly Therapy Dogs, Inc.), which is located in Cheyenne, Wyo., and Pet Partners (formerly Delta Society). Most of these organizations are registered, which means they provide liability insurance.

Therapy dogs are not covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act's rights to bring the animal into public establishments.

Between therapy dogs and service dogs are emotional support animals. Their primary function is to provide emotional support through companionship. Like therapy dogs, they are not covered under the ADA's rights to bring animals into public establishments. However, they may live with their disabled owners, even if a "no pets" policy is in place.

A service dog is specifically trained to assist just one person; however, they need to tolerate a wide variety of experiences, environments and people.

While there are no legally-recognized certification, registration or training standards for service dogs, Gies-Crowder called Canine Companions for Independence the gold standard. She also pointed to Freedom Service Dogs as another good service organization.

Service dogs are covered under the ADA's rights to bring animals into public establishments and they may live with their disabled owner, even if there is a "no pets" policy in place.

The ADA, beginning March 15, 2011, recognized only dogs as service animals under titles II and III. But, the Department of Justice's revised ADA regulations also have a new, separate provision about miniature horses that have been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Miniature horses range in height from about 24 inches to 34 inches, measured to the shoulders, and generally weigh between 70 and 100 pounds.

Gies-Crowder encouraged all businesses to know ADA guidelines for service animals, which state that state and local governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations that serve the public generally must allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas of the facility where the public is normally allowed to go. Service animals must be harnessed, leashed or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the service animal's work or the individual's disability prevents using these devices. In that case, the individual must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal or other effective controls.

Gies-Crowder just because someone else in the facility is allergic to dogs is not in and of itself a reason to deny access. When a person who is allergic to dog dander and a person who uses a service animal must spend time in the same room or facility — for example, in a school classroom or at a homeless shelter — they both should be accommodated by assigning them, if possible, to different locations within the room or different rooms in the facility.

When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, staff may only ask two questions: Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability? And, what work or task has the dog been trained to perform? Staff cannot ask about the person's disability, require medical documentation, require a special identification card or training documentation for the dog, or ask that the dog demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task.

A person with a disability cannot be asked to remove their service animal from the premises unless the dog is out of control and the handler does not take effective action to control it or the dog is not housebroken. When there is a legitimate reason to ask that a service animal be removed, staff must offer the person with the disability the opportunity to obtain goods or services without the animal's presence.

Gies-Crowder also noted businesses cannot tell the person with the disability they cannot bring their animal every day for the rest of the week. It's a day by day situation; staff must evaluate the animal's presence every day the disabled person comes in.

If a business such as a hotel normally charges guests for damage that they cause, a customer with a disability may also be charged for damage caused by themselves or their service animal. Staff are not required to provide care or food for a service animal.

To see the full ADA guidelines regarding service animals, visit https://www.ada.gov/service\_animals\_2010.htm

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