SERVICE ANIMAL POLICY
FORT WAYNE ZOO

POLICY

Created: 6/09 | Revised: 11/23 | Reviewed: 11/23

The Fort Wayne Children's Zoo wishes to protect the rights of those with disabilities in accordance to the Americans with Disabilities Act. The zoo and its team members will gladly provide reasonable accommodations to guests with disabilities.

Background

Service animals are defined as any dog (or miniature horse) that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including physical, mental, or other disabilities. The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the individual's disability.

Identification

Each service animal that enters the zoo must be evaluated individually. Some, but not all, service animals wear special items that state they are a service animal. In general, service animals should appear calm and comfortable in various situations. Zoo team members may ask the individual if the animal is a service animal required because of a disability, but official documentation is not required. Team members cannot request any documentation for the animal, require that the animal demonstrate its task, or inquire about the nature of the individual's disability. If the disability or disability-related need for a service animal is not readily apparent, a team member may ask the individual only the following two questions:

- Is the animal a service animal required because of a disability?
- What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

Visiting the Zoo

Service animals may accompany the individual into public areas of the zoo, except for those noted below as potentially unsafe. The care and supervision of service animals is solely the responsibility of the owner, and service animals must be under control at all times while on zoo grounds. Service animals in training may also accompany their trainer into the zoo, following the same guidelines of this policy. The front gate will provide an information sheet to the individual and make a radio announcement when service animals enter the zoo so that staff can be ready to assist if needed.

Exclusion and Restrictions

The zoo may exclude any service animal if the animal is not under the handler's control, is not housetrained, its behavior poses a direct threat to the health or safety of zoo guests or zoo animals, or if the animal is in a location in which the presence of zoo animals makes it unsafe.

Due to the potential for direct physical contact between service animals and zoo animals, service animals are restricted from entering the following areas:

- Rain Forest Dome
- Australia Walkthrough Aviary
- Kangaroo Yard
- Goat Yard
- Giraffe Platform
- Sky Safari
- Crocodile Creek Adventure Ride

This is a safety precaution for both the service animal and zoo animals. Because the animals are unfamiliar with each other, it is unknown how either will react. Following ADA guidelines, service animals may be restricted from areas where the zoo animals are the natural prey or natural predators of dogs, where the presence of a dog would be disruptive, causing the zoo animals to behave aggressively or become agitated. Behind the scenes areas are also restricted access, including most Wild Encounter Experiences.

Other Animals and Pets

Health and safety of all outside animals, zoo animals, guests, and employees is of top priority. Outside animals and zoo animals may react defensively or aggressively if placed in unfamiliar circumstances. Due to the unique nature of the zoo, dogs or other animals that are not trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability are generally not permitted to enter the zoo. This includes emotional support animals, therapy animals, and pets.

Team Member Training

Team members should be trained on:

- How to identify service animals,
- What questions team members can and cannot ask,
- The distinction between a service animal and an emotional support animal,
- When a service animal can legally be excluded.

Appendix: Additional Background Information and FAQs

Service animals are generally the only group of outside animals permitted into the zoo. This information is included to better help team members understand the different types of assistance animals, so that they may be informed and ready to assist guests with these questions.

Service Animal FAQs

Service animals are working animals intended to perform specific tasks related to the person's disability. Generally, only dogs or miniature horses (which are rare) may qualify as a service animal. The service animal must be trained to take a specific action when needed to assist the person with a disability. For example, a person with diabetes may have a dog that is trained to alert him when his blood sugar reaches high or low levels. Or, a person who has epilepsy may have a dog that is trained to detect the onset of a seizure and then help the person remain safe during the seizure. There are no breed or size requirements for dogs acting as service animals. Some people with disabilities may use more than one service animal to perform different tasks.

A service animal shall have a harness, leash, or other tether, unless either the handler is unable to use it because of a disability or if it would interfere with the service animal´s work or tasks, in which case the service animal must be otherwise under the handler´s control (e.g., voice control, signals, or other effective means).

The ADA does not require any standardized training or certification program for service animals, nor does it require the handler to provide any form of documentation stating the necessity for a service animal. The animal must follow the required local vaccine laws and animal registration and licensing laws, but the handler does not have to register his or her animal as a service animal. The service animal is not legally required to wear a vest, ID tag, or specific harness indicating that it is a service animal.

In general, service animals should appear calm, as they are trained to handle various situations while remaining calm and still performing their required tasks.

Service Animal or Emotional Support Animal?

An emotional support animal (ESA) may be an animal of any species, the use of which is supported by a qualified physician, psychiatrist, or other mental health professional based upon a disability-related need. An ESA provides comfort just by being with a person. An ESA does not have to be trained to perform any particular task and are not recognized as service animals under the ADA. Both service animals and ESAs are considered assistance animals as they accompany their handler and assist him or her; however because of their different legal statuses, the rights of access for ESA's are not as broad as service animals.

The key difference in determining whether or not an animal (almost always a dog or possibly a miniature horse) is a service animal is whether it performs a specific task or function related to the individual's disability. If the animal's presence simply provides comfort or emotional support, it is an emotional support animal.

Training

For service animals: Guide dogs and hearing dogs, for instance, have programs that will train them to become accustomed to novel stimuli, maneuver through the public, ensure their handler's safety, and alert their handler of any potential dangers. These programs may then "certify" a dog as a service dog upon successful completion. A service dog working for an individual with PTSD may learn to check around corners and rooms before the handler enters. This is a task the individual may have trained the dog to do rather than having the dog enrolled in a specific program. Because both situations are considered tasks performed for the individual's disability, both would be considered service dogs.

ESAs, on the other hand, do not require or demonstrate any specific training. They provide emotional, physical, or psychological support through companionship. Ideally, they are calm, know basic commands, and respond to the owner's call. While they are not trained to perform a task, ESAs have value in that they provide support and help disabled persons carry out activities of daily living.

Examples:

- If the disorder is a psychiatric disability, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or autism, and the dog has been trained to perform a specific action that allows the person to carry out daily activities or takes specific actions to avoid or to mitigate the severity of the disorder, it is a service animal. Conversely, if the animal provides companionship and emotional support for those diagnosed with a psychological disorder, it is an ESA.
- In cases of anxiety attacks, if the dog has been trained to sense when an anxiety attack is about to start and takes active measures to help avoid or lessen the attack, it is a service animal. If the dog's presence simply provides comfort, it is an ESA.

Therapy Animals

A therapy animal is a type of animal-assisted intervention in which there is a goal directed intervention in which an animal meeting specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. Animal-assisted therapy is provided in a variety of settings, and may be group or individual in nature. Therapy animals, like ESAs, are generally not permitted in the zoo.

Responding to Additional Guest Questions

If a guest has questions about why we do not allow emotional support or therapy animals into the zoo:

- Apologize for the inconvenience, but explain our priority is safety and only service animals trained to perform work or tasks for an individual with a disability are permitted in the zoo.
- We aren't denying the support that your dog provides or the training that he/she has had, but with the potential for direct contact between zoo animals and assistance animals we have to be extra cautious and only allow service animals as required by the ADA.
- We don't know how the animals would react in these unfamiliar circumstances, and we have a responsibility to the animals under our care to not put them in potentially negative situations.

- For your dog's safety, please do not leave him/her in your car. Another guest is likely to see this and call Animal Care and Control.
- Franke Park has great areas to walk together, if you would like somewhere nearby to be with your dog.

If a guest has questions about why their service animal is not permitted in certain areas:

- Apologize for the inconvenience, but explain our priority is safety. We have a responsibility to guests, team members, our animals, and service animals.
- We aren't denying the training that your dog has received or that he/she knows what to do, but our animals aren't trained in the same way and they may not know how to act in these situations.
- We don't know how the animals would react in these unfamiliar circumstances, and we have a responsibility to the animals under our care to not put them in potentially negative situations.
- We have had assistance in reviewing this policy to ensure these guidelines follow required ADA accommodations.