



Position Statement on Emotional Support Animals

Pet Partners recognizes the positive impact of the human-animal bond in many situations, including the presence of, and interaction with, companion animals, therapy animals, assistance animals, and emotional support animals. However, we also note that the rapid and relatively unregulated growth of emotional support animals has created confusion within the therapy animal space. While we will continue to educate the public about the difference between these categories of animals, we also wish to clarify our position on emotional support animals (ESAs).

Best practice among providers of mental health services calls for any therapeutic practice designed to enhance the emotional or mental health of an individual, including ESAs, to be prescribed or recommended by a licensed professional who has an ongoing therapeutic relationship with the client. That mental health professional should be able to provide ongoing oversight of the implementation and efficacy of the chosen therapeutic practice, collaborating with other professionals as needed to ensure that the working relationship between client and ESA is informed both by mental health and animal behavior expertise.

With ESAs, this extends to awareness of the current lack of evidence supporting ESA as an effective therapeutic intervention; the potential impact of acting as an ESA on the animal's welfare; awareness and mitigation of risk (which includes assessing the suitability of the animal in a public setting); as well as establishing whether the client can provide the necessary care and oversight to ensure the welfare of the pet. It should also be noted that specific governing regulations and policies related to ESAs must be realized, as ESAs do not have public access rights in situations that are not protected by the Federal Housing Administration and/or the Air Carrier Access Act.

When endorsed by the overseeing practitioner, ESAs may become registered therapy animals with Pet Partners if the handler-animal team can meet the standards for registration. However, the role of the animal as an ESA confers no special status on the therapy animal, and care should be taken to avoid confusion between the differing roles of an ESA and a therapy animal at all times.



About This Document

Pet Partners holds a variety of positions on therapy animal health and welfare that are not only important to our message and organization, but are also important to researchers, professionals, facilities, and the general public. This position statement has been approved by Pet Partners' Human-Animal Bond Advisory Board.