

Evaluating Dogs for Service Dog Training

Ninety percent purebred Labrador Retrievers and 10% exceptional dogs are accepted into the service dog training program. We have found purebred Labs are best because they have a greater tolerance for everything compared to other breeds.

When we accept any other breed or mix than a Lab, it must be at least one year old, and be an exceptional dog!

We prefer dogs that are one to two years old. We occasionally make exceptions if the dog is an exceptional dog or *if a breeder is donating a puppy from a pairing of two dogs with good temperaments.*

Temperament/Stress Testing

There should be no signs of aggressive behavior- no growl, bearing teeth, barking, or defensive body language toward humans and other dogs

Exercises

1. Approach dog, pet him all over (dog should enjoy this), then run up to dog and pet excitedly
2. Put food down in a bowl, then take away- the same with toy and chew bone
3. Gently pull ears, stick fingers in mouth, pull tail
4. Pick up each of dog's 4 paws (dog can display mild resistance, but not trying to get away)
5. Roll dog on his side and rub belly (dog should enjoy)
6. Drop an object to make a loud noise near dog (may be startled, but does not run, recovers quickly)
7. Feed the dog next to other dogs. Play with dog with toys with other dogs- no food or toy aggression
8. Turn dog out with small and large dogs to make sure he gets along with all other dogs
9. Have several people approach the dog at once, crowding the dog- make sure the dog does not shy away

Cooperation

Dog should be more interested in staying with a person more than anything, but also be motivated by a toy or treat.

Exercises

1. Call dog to you excitedly- he should come, wagging tail (even if he jumps or shows no manners)
2. Using a treat or a toy, see if the dog will follow you around and focus on the treat or toy
3. Put the dog on a leash in a secure area and walk the dog using a toy or treat to motivate the dog to walk with you
4. Sit in a chair with the dog on a leash- quietly pet the dog to encourage him to relax and sit or lie down quietly with you

Public Areas – Stress Testing

Take your dog on a leash into a public area that allows dogs like a pet store or a Bass Pro Shop. Walk him around and see if he feels comfortable around strange people and dogs. Notice if he shows any signs of stress in the parking lot or in the store. Signs of stress include a tucked tail, heavy panting, running away or hiding behind you, darting eyes, not wanting to move or listen to you, etc.

This is a crucial test. Service Dogs must be confident in all situations. Being afraid and showing signs of stress is a major red flag!

Service Dogs Alabama would like to know the reason for surrender if possible and any observations you have about the dog's behavior. **Fear and stress issues in a dog are the #1 reason they cannot finish the Service Dog program.**

We would also be concerned about any anxieties that are attached to a dog's destructive behaviors such as escaping from fences or digging (although digging and escaping in themselves are re-trainable), and we would be concerned about dogs who are "runners" (run away from you), even if they eventually come back.