

SERVICE DOG TASKS
for
PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES

**Tasks to mitigate certain disabling illnesses classified as mental
impairments under
The Americans with Disabilities Act**

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SERVICE DOG TASKS
FOR PANIC DISORDER, PTSD and DEPRESSION

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a service animal must be individually trained to do work or perform tasks of benefit to a disabled individual in order to be legally elevated from pet status to service animal status. It is the specially trained tasks or work performed on command or cue that legally exempts a service dog [service animal] and his disabled handler from the “No Pets Allowed” policies of stores, restaurants and other places of public accommodation under the ADA.

The following list identifies a number of tasks a service dog could be trained to do that would serve to mitigate the effects of a disabling condition classified as a psychiatric disability. In particular, the tasks were developed for those who become disabled by Panic Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or Depression, conditions attributed to a brain chemistry malfunction. The List also contains some activities that may be useful as a coping mechanism, but would not stand up in a court of law as "a trained task that mitigates the effect of a disability," and those will be marked with a Disclaimer to provide guidance to a therapist and patient on that issue. The author, a mobility impaired service dog trainer who has been deeply involved in the assistance dog field for many years, initiated research into this new kind of assistance dog in 1997. She became familiar with these disorders through the input of early pioneers of the psychiatric service dog concept. Subsequent research has involved garnering input from experts in psychology and psychiatry and from patients to gain a better understanding of the symptoms, treatment goals, and ways in which partnership with a service dog might become a valuable adjunct to conventional therapy.

In addition to task training, it should also be recognized that housebreaking, basic obedience training and mastering the behaviors of no nuisance barking, no aggressive behavior, and no inappropriate sniffing or intrusion into another person or dog’s space are an essential part of educating any dog for a career as a service dog.

CLARIFICATION: While a dog’s companionship may offer emotional support, comfort or a sense of security, this in and of itself does NOT qualify as a “trained task” or “work” under the ADA, thus it does not give a disabled person the legal right to take that dog out in public as a legitimate service dog. Setting up a realistic training plan to transform a dog with a suitable temperament into an obedient, task trained service dog is the only way to legally qualify a dog to become a service dog [service animal] whose disabled handler is legally permitted to take the dog into restaurants, grocery stores, hospitals, medical offices and other places of public accommodation. I recommend reading IAADP’s Minimum Training Standards for Public Access for further guidance at www.iaadp.org

GENDER: While I refer to a dog as “him” in this article rather than using the word “it,” both genders can be equally good at a service dog career if the dog has the temperament to calmly tolerate loud noises, other animals, strangers reaching out to pet the dog without permission and the other challenges of working with a service dog out in public.

Assistance Work or Tasks for Psychiatric Disabilities

I. Assistance in a Medical Crisis

II. Treatment Related Assistance

III. Assistance Coping With Emotional Overload

IV. Security Enhancement Tasks

I. ASSISTANCE IN A MEDICAL CRISIS

A service dog can learn a number of helpful tasks to assist his partner to cope during a sudden flare up of symptoms, medication side effects, or in a situation requiring outside help.

Bring Medication to Alleviate Symptoms

Dog assists partner to cope with nausea, cramps, dizziness, other medication side effects or the fear paralysis of PTSD or the sudden waves of terror, chest pains and respiratory distress of a severe panic attack by fetching antidote medication to alleviate the severity of the symptoms.

- **Dog is trained to retrieve a small canvas bag with medication from a specific location that he is schooled to go to on command, such as a closet floor, bathroom vanity or shelf.**
- **Dog can be trained to go tug open a cupboard door and retrieve a basket or satchel with medication if access to the first location is blocked by the door to the room being shut.**
- **Dog can be trained to locate a purse with medication in home, office or on a hotel room dresser, desk or chair by following directional commands, then drag-deliver it to partner.**

Bring a Beverage So Human Partner Can Swallow Medication

This complex task involves a sequence of skills, takes four to six months to master.

- **Dog can be trained to fetch a beverage to enable the human partner to swallow the medication. Must master the skills of: 1) going to the kitchen from another room to pull open a refrigerator door or cupboard door with a strap, 2) picking up the beverage from refrigerator shelf before the door swings shut, 3) carrying cold beverage to the partner in another room, 4) going back, if need be, to shut the refrigerator door or instead: 5) fetch a basket or some other container from a kitchen cupboard with a beverage and other items; may also contain antidote type medication in a vial with a childproof cap.**

Bring The Emergency Phone During a Crisis

Enables the human partner to contact a doctor, therapist or others in a support system when experiencing alarming medication side effects, terror or respiratory distress from a panic attack, or a flashback. An individual suffering from depression, possibly with suicidal ideation, also needs to be able to reach a supporting person or agency. Retrieval of the portable phone can be very useful in other situations too. (Training Note: this should be made a “place command,” as asking a dog to visually search the house is unreliable, especially if the phone is left on a counter or piece of furniture above the dog’s line of sight. It is best to locate the charger unit on the floor in a room with two entrances. If possible, the emergency phone should never be used except during practice sessions. This will ensure its availability during a crisis.)

- **Dog is trained to bring the handler a portable phone. If the room where the emergency phone is permanently located has two entrances, the dog should also be specifically taught to find the second entrance in case the first is blocked. The end goal is to train a service dog to bring the phone to any room in the house when needed on command.**

Answer the Doorbell

When situations occur in which the handler urgently needs help but cannot get to the front door to let someone into the home due to physical incapacity from drug interactions, injuries that occurred due to lightheadedness, fainting, other side effects, or illness, the service dog could assist by opening the front door and escorting emergency personnel or a member of the support system to the handler’s location.

- **Dog is trained to tug strap on a lever handle to open the front door to let in emergency personnel or members of support system on command or in response to the doorbell itself.**
- **Dog is trained to escort the person to the handler’s location.**

Call 911 or Suicide Hotline on K-9 Rescue Phone

People with physical disabilities have reported going through periods of severe depression and not a few admit they’ve contemplated suicide. Those with a mental disability like PTSD are equally susceptible to developing this mood disorder or experiencing a sudden exacerbation of its symptoms. Scientists view it as a biological problem, not purely psychological. With some persons, the condition becomes a lifelong struggle. A service dog can improve the safety of his partner whenever the mood disorder becomes life threatening. One task to consider is schooling the dog to operate the K-9 Rescue phone to summon help during a crisis. [available at www.ablephone.com]

- **Dog is trained to call 911 / any preprogrammed number by depressing the huge white button on a K-9 Rescue speaker-phone with his paw.**

Bring Help Indoors and Provide Speech Impairment Assistance

Symptoms of extreme terror, shortness of breath or the wrong dosage of a major tranquilizer like thiorazine are a few of the reasons why the patient may need to summon help and may not be able to give a verbal command. Suggested tasks can be taught with hand signals so as to enable the team to communicate in such

a crisis. These tasks may be useful at other times too.

- **Dog taught to bark at a speaker-phone on a hand signal (As pre-planned with the patient's family, therapist or other members of his or her Support System.)**
- **Dog is trained to go nudge a certain household member on command in a crisis.**
- **Dog taught to carry a note to a spouse or another household member on command.**
- **Dog should learn to open interior doors with a lever handle and strap or knob-to-lever conversion device so he could exit bedroom or office to carry out a "get help" task.**

Summon Help from a Secretary, Co-worker or Supervisor

Dog can learn to carry a message to designated support person or relief person in an office or retail setting. Could also learn to bark to summon designated employee as prearranged.

- **There are a variety of ways a dog could summon help in the workplace. It will depend on the situation and/or particular tasks he has been schooled to perform.**

Provide Balance Assistance on Stairs

Goal is to prevent a serious injury from a fall. Very useful if the person experiences dizziness due to medication side effects of psychotropic drugs. Task also can assist individuals who experience dizziness or weakness due to not eating because of major depression. Rest one hand on the withers of a large sturdy dog to steady oneself on each step, harness optional.

- **Large dog is trained to assist his partner to climb or descend stairs with greater safety, by halting on each step, then bracing himself on command to steady the person when the person takes their next step. Dog must learn to only take one step, not 2 or 3 at a time.**

Assist Person to Rise & Steady that Person

When the partner must cope with weakness or medication side effects like dizziness, a service dog schooled in balance support work can prevent a fall or assist the partner to get up after a fall occurs. (*Training Note:* Introduce one's weight gradually to a beginner; only reward correct responses. One hand should be on the dog's withers, the other may lightly rest on his rump. Push down ONLY on withers so human's weight borne by the dog's powerful shoulders in the few seconds it takes to boost oneself to a standing position. Ethically, the service dog must be an appropriate size for this work - e.g. 55 lbs. or more)

- **Dog assists someone to get up from the floor or a chair by holding a Stand Stay position and stiffening his muscles on command, bracing himself to offer counter resistance for balance support when the partner places one hand on the dog's withers and gets up.**
- **Dog is further trained to Brace on command, stiffening body, acts as the Rock of Gibraltar, for at least ten seconds, to steady someone as soon as they rise to their feet instead of darting away or**

sitting, so as to prevent an accidental loss of balance.

Balance Support to Ambulatory Partner

Balance support skills in a dog of suitable size can be a valuable asset when medication side effects or symptoms suddenly put the individual at risk of falling. These tasks can be performed off leash, without a harness, indoors. Frequent practice needed to keep these skills viable.

- **A large dog can be schooled to prevent a fall by stiffening his body to provide counter balance help if a person suddenly stumbles or feels dizzy. Ethically, you must give a warning with a command like “Brace” before putting weight on the dog’s withers, so he can stiffen his muscles first.**
- **Large dogs can be trained to assist a person to ambulate to the nearest seat, step by step, bracing after each step to allow the person to steady oneself when taking next step.**

Respond to Smoke Alarm if Partner Unresponsive

Someone who has disassociation episodes with PTSD might be an excellent candidate for the same kind of training given to a dog who must alert a heavily sedated partner (as described in next section) whenever a smoke alarm goes off. If he or she has disassociated and there’s a fire, the dog can learn to respond to the sound by nudging the partner persistently till handler aware enough to reward the dog and dial 911.

However, if the person typically is not responsive to nudges while in such a state, the trainer could teach the dog to go to a K-9 Rescue Phone [see www.ablephone.com] and paw the button to dial 911 in response to a smoke alarm’s sound. Local 911 computers can be programmed, if handler requests it, to instruct operator that if no voice is heard, to assume the service dog in residence is placing the call due to a life threatening emergency. If the human partner happens to be fully aware when the smoke alarm goes off, he or she can easily intervene to disconnect the call after praising the dog for responding appropriately to that particular sound. Will need once a month practice sessions to maintain this skill in a service dog. (*Training Note:* may program this phone to call your own number so 911 isn’t bothered during practice sessions)

- **Dog is trained to persistently nudge partner to alert to smoke alarm whenever needed.**
- **Alternately, the dog is trained to call 911 on K9 Rescue phone if smoke alarm goes off.**

Backpacking Medical Related Supplies / Information

Some may protest that this should not be counted as a task and I agree. It deserves a mention, though, because it is so useful to assistance dog partners who may be in need of the items being carried by the service dog. While most dogs will calmly permit strangers such as emergency personnel to search the backpacks in a medical crisis so they can obtain the human partner’s Medic Alert information, [if any] or the dog’s Emergency care-giver Information card or other instructions the dog may be carrying in case the need arises, some dogs will require one or more desensitization sessions to socialize them till they will tolerate a stranger searching the packs.

- **Dog carries Medication in the backpack in case of a panic attack, other symptoms. Also may carry a Beverage, plus a Cell Phone or Beeper, and Instructions For Emergency Personnel, such**

as Who To Call if a patient is having a PTSD disassociation episode, a flashback, or if serious medication side effects, an injury or other problems should deprive the handler of the ability to provide important information about the team. DISCLAIMER: *Please understand Backpacking is NOT a task that will legally “count” as a trained task acceptable in a court of law as proof the dog meets the legal definition of a service animal under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). It is simply an optional extra, a “bonus aid,” which any dog lover, disabled or non disabled, may enjoy. Such items could be carried in a purse or fanny pack, so it is a matter of personal choice*

II. TREATMENT RELATED ASSISTANCE

Tasks in this section suggest additional ways in which a service dog might assist a patient to cope with aspects of living with a psychiatric disability. This may include tasks to help a partner mitigate chronic or intermittent medication side effects or to take his or her medication on schedule or to assist with symptoms experienced in spite of the treatment being received.

Medication Reminder at Certain Time of Day

Success has been reported in making use of a dog’s internal alarm clock, to remind the partner to take medication on time. Teach the dog to expect to be fed or to have a cookie break or to go for a walk at the same time every day. Some service dogs will pick up their food bowl or leash and bring it to the partner at the same time each day, as if they can read the clock. Other dogs may nudge or bark at the partner, begging for their dinner, treat or walk at the expected time. Submissive dogs should be encouraged to “bother” the partner with nudging or pawing at that time of day. If always rewarded, this behavior becomes habitual, a task that serves to remind the partner that it is time to stop an ongoing activity and to take the prescribed medication.

- **Dog trained to interrupt the partner at a certain time of day or night. Dog encouraged by training to “nag” a person till he receives the anticipated food or cookie or walk. This increases the probability the partner will get up to take the pill when it is due. Can be a task in the home and perhaps in the workplace or at school if circumstances permit.**

Speech Impairment Task Away from Home

If a loss of speech may occur due to side effects of a major tranquilizer or anti depressant medication or PTSD or a panic attack, consider carrying a card that explains what is happening to you, to show to a security guard, teacher, employer or bus driver as needed. This card can reassure them you do NOT need help or, conversely, ask them to call somebody on your behalf. It can be a postcard size or business card size, laminated. Also it is useful to have a similar card to explain your dog is a service dog and your civil rights whenever you are unable to do so.

- **Dog is trained to deliver a laminated card to someone his partner points to.**

Coping With the Medication Side Effect - Dry Mouth woes

Some medications cause side effects that are more than a minor nuisance. For example, with the condition of dry-mouth the patient's speech will become progressively impaired if the person does not have a beverage constantly available as an antidote. It is highly useful to have a dog trained to fetch a beverage from a kitchen cupboard or refrigerator, so the person does not have to interrupt an important activity to get a refill to re-hydrate one's self.

- **Dog is trained to retrieve a beverage from a Cupboard or Refrigerator by hand signal.**

Alert Sedated Partner to the Cry of Someone in Distress

Some psychotropic medication cause deep sedation, during which it is almost impossible to regain consciousness. Other medications for pain, seizures or anxiety also can cause sedative side effects. If a parent or care-giver who takes such medication has a service dog trained to perform this outstanding "get help" task, the child or a spouse or an elderly parent who calls out in the middle of the night for the dog's partner won't be calling out in vain

- **Similar to a hearing dog responding to an alarm clock; dog jumps on bed, persistently licks face or nudges partner till the partner wakes up, gives the dog a reward.**
- **The dog leads the groggy adult to whomever is calling for the dog's human partner.**

Wake Sedated Partner, Alerting to Doorbell

Waiting for a plumber, other repairmen, a delivery truck which may or may not show up can be problematic. One cannot skip a dose or forego medication if panic attack symptoms begin. Schooling a dog to wake up his partner in response to doorbell chimes can solve the dilemma.

- **Similar to hearing dog alert. Dog trained to awaken sleeping partner who takes medication with sedative side effects and lead that person to the source of the sound.**

Alert Sedated Partner to Smoke Alarm & Assist to Exit

The dog can be trained to persist in arousing a person if sedative side effect prevents person from responding appropriately to the smoke alarm in an emergency. The dog can show the way to nearest exit, tug the door strap on a lever handle to open the door, not because a dog understands "danger" but due to many practice sessions that condition the service dog to perform this habitual sequence of tasks whenever the dog hears a smoke alarm going off.

- **Dog is trained to alert the human partner and to persist with the method taught such as face licking or nuzzling till the person sits up, rewards dog, indicating awake state.**
- **Dog is trained to lead his partner to the front door (or some other pre-selected exit)**

- **Dog opens exit door with a pull strap in case the partner is too sedated to think clearly.**

Harness Work with Ambulatory Partner

In spite of treatment, some people experience such a degree of fear or panic they report they frequently stumble as they cannot pay attention to their footing at such times. Others report chronic or intermittent dizziness that results in falls unless they can hang onto a family member's arm, a dependency that can restrict access to the outside world to only a few hours a week. Veterans with PTSD may experience balance problems from another issue, such as a traumatic brain injury, vertigo etc., as do civilians with psychiatric disorders according to programs working with such individuals. Use of a balance support harness with a rigid handle custom sized to bridge the distance between the withers of a large sturdy dog and the partner's height can be a solution that reduces the risk of injurious falls. In addition to the counter balance skill, such dogs could be trained like a guide dog to halt at curbs, steps, etc. to signal a risky elevation change to assist inattentive handlers to avoid a fall. The handle itself also enhances the partner's sense of "connectedness" with the service dog, which for some is a highly rated side benefit according to anecdotal input. Not everyone with a psychiatric disability needs or wants this optional task, but I mention it as it has been beneficial in some cases.

Ethical programs / trainers /handlers only select large dogs, 55 - 150 lbs., matched to the partner's height, weight, for this work. Physical soundness is essential, to prevent any harm to the dog from doing it. Dogs who must cope with the weight of partner, bracing on a frequent basis on outings, are customarily required to pass an orthopedic exam with x-rays for hip and elbow dysplasia to rule out these crippling joint diseases prior to counter balance training. A proper fitting harness with padding on pressure points, [see www.circle-e.net for an example], is also essential. Such harnesses run from an estimated \$70 for pre-made gear up to \$500 for custom sizing & amenities like a lightweight airline metal handle, fold down option, ergonomic styled grip and a pressure relief saddle.

NOTE: The use of smaller dogs [10 lbs - 50 lbs] for balance support by having the dog drag the owner along, keeping the leash taut, results in the owner putting a heavy strain on the poor dog's neck through the collar. Whether or not it aids the owner to keep his or her balance is irrelevant, for it is ethically viewed as abusive treatment of an assistance dog, which is inexcusable.

- **Large, physically sound dogs can be trained to assist a partner who would benefit from such aid to reduce the risk of falls while walking. It is customary to use a harness with a rigid handle designed to ergonomically distribute the weight of the partner, whenever the partner pushes down on the handle, after giving a "Brace" command to signal the dog to go into action and provide counter balance help.**

III. COPING WITH EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD

This section details specific work or tasks a service dog can be trained to perform to assist the handler with emotionally disabling symptoms other than a fear of a violent crime reoccurring. It suggests strategies to use at home or in the workplace or in public to cope with and recover from an emotional overload. It also looks

at ways to prevent feelings of panic from escalating. Quite frankly, most dogs do not rush sympathetically to the side of a human to comfort the person when he or she becomes tearful or trembles with fear or experiences a panic attack. The calm detachment of many dogs enables them to learn and carry out tasks to earn a reward. Dogs who initially show avoidance behavior can often be desensitized to emotional reactions if highly food motivated and then learn a task. Such tasks if practiced on a regular basis will empower the disabled individual to do something constructive about very unwelcome or inappropriate emotional reactions rather than feeling helpless and overwhelmed when they occur.

Provide Tactile Stimulation to Disrupt the Overload

Tasks that can provide a tactile distraction from a disorder's symptoms have proven to be quite useful in emotional overload situations. One or more of the tasks listed below may put a stop to unwelcome reactions in the workplace, classroom or out in public. In addition, for those experiencing nightmares, night terrors, hypnagogic hallucinations or flashbacks, tactile stimulation can provide a vitally important *reality affirmation* when the partner summons the dog. While some dogs may naturally perform a behavior, it takes schooling to transform it into a task the dog will do immediately on command, reliable even in the presence of distractions, at any location where needed.

- **Dog is trained to vigorously lick someone's face on command to bring his partner to full awareness, just as seizure response dogs can be trained to do when their partner is extremely groggy after a grand mal, which shortens the recovery time. This unpleasant tactile stimulation also can divert the partner's attention from something that triggers tears or other inappropriate emotional reactions in school or a workplace.**
- **Dogs can be trained to get up from under a desk or behind chair on command or a cue like patting one's knee to use nose to nudge the partner which disrupts sudden overload. To assist the person to regain composure, the dog must learn to be obnoxiously persistent with the nudging till the partner recovers enough to respond with the desired reward.**
- **A caregiver can adapt this nudging task into a "Go See (David)" command so the service dog will go over and perform this nudging to interrupt inappropriate repetitive behavior that a child on the autism spectrum may engage in. If a dog is large and persistent, unfazed by emotional outbursts, this nudging could also disrupt a child's tantrum or assist someone crying or having a flashback to recover faster.**
- **Dog is asked to get up on the bed and to tolerate a hug or to snuggle next to the person to permit the person to pet the dog till the person feels better. *DISCLAIMER: Please understand this last activity is NOT going to legally "count" as a trained task acceptable in a court of law as proof the dog meets the legal definition of a service animal. It is something that may not require any training for an affectionate pet. These are interactions of the sort any dog lover, disabled or non disabled, may find beneficial when emotionally upset. Such comfort is considered to be a "bonus" by service dog handlers. Since some individuals prefer this interaction to a "snap them out of it" task, it seems worth mentioning this is an option.***

Break the Spell and/or Combat Sedative Side Effects

If tasks which provide tactile stimulation don't suffice, this "break the spell" strategy frequently helps in certain situations. After experiencing night terrors, repeated nightmares, hypnagogic hallucinations, sickening memories or suicidal thoughts that can't be shaken, an abrupt change of scene to break the spell can be the best medicine. By going into another room with your service dog, asking him to perform tasks, it will make it possible to get one's mind off what has just occurred, or in the case of intrusive thoughts due to PTSD or suicidal ideation, to disrupt what is still occurring. It can also help a person to shake off the grogginess of sedative side effects.

- **Dog is trained to turn on bedroom or hall light or other lights, if needed.**
- **Dog is trained to bring the TV Remote on command, which enables the partner to switch on the set, utilizing the startle effect of this sudden audio and visual stimuli plus this additional teamwork to vanquish extremely distressing thoughts, feelings and images. It can prevent a relapse of sleep disturbances.**
- **Dog is trained to fetch a Beverage and/or Medication, becoming the focal point of his partner's attention as he carries out the command(s). The concentration required for a successful delivery and the heartwarming cooperation of one's service dog can disrupt the deeply disturbing thoughts that have taken hold of the partner's mind. It strengthens the partner's ability to remain in the "here & now."**
- **Dog or partner initiates a game of fetch or tug with a toy, which assists the person to resist sedative side effects and may break the grip of obsessive thoughts or memories. DISCLAIMER: *this kind of play will not count as a "trained task" in a court of law and it does NOT legally transform a pet into a service animal, as untrained dogs can do it. It could serve as an alternative coping strategy if a dog lacks the schooling to perform the suggested tasks.***

Wake up Human Partner for Work or School

Panic Disorder, PTSD, Major Depression can disrupt normal thought processes. The person may not want to get up for work or school, as it means he or she will be returning to a place that he or she blames as being responsible for the panic attack or flashback. Depression can cause apathy or a desire to withdraw rather than face the world. Success has been noted in fighting back against avoidance behavior, apathy or withdrawal by having the service dog respond like a hearing dog to the alarm clock in the morning. It may also be possible to train the dog to go by his internal alarm clock to eagerly awaken the person at a certain hour of the day, through use of a feeding schedule or if not motivated by food, by the promise of a walk. After sitting up to reward the dog for performing this task, the sight of the dog's happy face, the extra tactile stimulation as he eagerly anticipates a walk or play session or a bowl of dog food can motivate a dog lover to fight back against avoidance behavior or apathy and get out of bed, which is why having a dog perform this task is arguably superior to just using an easily silenced alarm clock.

- **Dog responds to alarm clock like a hearing dog. Wakes up his partner by getting up on the bed,**

then nuzzling the partner with a cold nose or by licking the partner's face.

- **Dog can be trained to wake a person up according to “internal alarm clock,” at same time every day.**

Prevent or Combat Emotional Overload in Workplace

These tasks may have an incidental therapeutic benefit, giving a feeling of solace to some handlers, but their primary purpose is to empower the human partner to recover and sustain emotional control in settings where uncontrolled emotional reactions are unacceptable

- **Use licking or nose nudging task as described in earlier Tactile Stimulation section.**
- **During a business meeting, a dog can assist his partner by unobtrusively maintaining a Sit Stay without sliding into the Down position, out of reach. A toy breed could be told to perform a Down Stay in the partner's lap. The human partner utilizes a relaxation technique such as giving the dog a massage or simply strokes the dog's fur to calm self, so he or she can to continue to take part in the meeting.** *DISCLAIMER: Please understand that obedience to a Stay command to allow petting or the voluntary presence of a dog for petting is NOT a service dog task that will legally count as a trained task in a court of law. Nevertheless, I mention it here as a “Bonus Aid,” as it provides an emotional benefit that anecdotal reports suggest can be valuable to someone experiencing a panic attack, an anxiety attack or other kinds of emotional upsets.*

Providing an Excuse to Leave Upsetting Situation

The following task may be an effective coping mechanism in the workplace and elsewhere, preventing a loss of self control in front of others. The dog is trained to assist the person to escape from a certain conversation, a room, or a building to earn a reward. In response to a surreptitious hand signal or another cue, the dog performs an attention seeking behavior such as nuzzling and licking the partner's hand or jumping up to disrupt a query or confrontation that triggers an emotional overload. This provides the human partner with a plausible reason for taking a break from an intolerable situation with a boss, client or co-worker, thus saving face or the job. Some breeds can learn to vocalize on command, whining or “talking” or giving a short yip in response to a surreptitious hand signal, (for example, flexing the first digit of the forefinger on your right hand). This increases the impression that it is urgent for the disabled person to take dog outside before the dog has an accident in the office due to the dog's alleged stomach or bowel upset.

- **Dog trained to “bother” his partner with pawing or a nose nudge, or by jumping up or crawling up into lap on cue, providing a plausible excuse to leave.**
- **Dog may be trained to vocalize as if urgently needing to go outside, on cue.**

Assist to Leave the Area by Finding Exit

Just as a guide dog can be taught to “Find the Exit” in a store or hotel lobby or a classroom, a number of

persons with PTSD or panic disorder report it is helpful to have their service dogs schooled to lead them to the nearest Exit on command or cue, whenever they fear imminent loss of self control due to anger or experience symptoms that are precursors to a full blown panic attack or disassociative episode. The dog should learn ahead of time where a specific exit can be found, be encouraged to find it, rewarded for finding it with several practice sessions minimum in a new place before he can be expected to find it on command without a lot of help from the handler and/or a trainer. It can take months of schooling for this to become a reliable strategy for leaving an area when symptoms flare up, especially if the dog is expected to respond to symptoms as a cue rather than a verbal command. Input from trainers clarified the dog does not drag the person; the partner must be willing and able to immediately respond to the dog's effort to lead them away from a stressful situation as soon as the person feels a slight tug on the leash.

- **Dog is schooled to find a specific exit to a classroom, an office, a store, a hotel lobby etc. on command or cue to assist someone to leave a high stress situation.**

Provide Deep Pressure for Calming Effect

Those who suffer from panic attacks have reported that the pressure of the weight of a medium size dog or a large dog against their abdomen and chest has a significant calming effect. It can shorten the duration of the attack; often prevent the symptoms from escalating. This same task performed by service dogs for its calming benefit for children and adults who are autistic and prone to panic attacks has become known as “deep pressure therapy” in the assistance dog field. One way it is performed is to have a medium size dog lie atop someone who is lying on their back on a floor, bed or sofa, forepaws over the shoulders of the partner. A large dog could be too heavy in that position; also some dogs dislike it. A second way is have the partner sit up in a recliner chair, with the large dog approaching from the side so when he does a “Lap Up” on command, standing on his hind legs, he will be draping most of his body weight across the partner's abdomen, lying partly on his side, leaning his shoulder into the partner's torso, his forelegs on the other side of the partner's lap. Once trained to quietly hold that position for up to five minutes, this same task can be adapted to just about any chair, couch or bench seat his partner sits on. A dog should be given a rest break for at least a minute, back on all four paws, before repeating this task on his hind legs. Similarly, the weight and warmth of a medium to large size dog lying across the partner's lap, applying pressure to that person's stomach and chest, may be utilized in a vehicle's front seat, on the ground or in another location that supports the dog's entire body in the Down position, for as long as needed during a panic attack.

- **Dog is trained to provide deep pressure therapy during a panic attack. Precise behavior at such a time may be dictated by dog's size, preference and partner's location. Dog must be trained to promptly get Off the person on command.**

Crowd Control, Panic Prevention In Public

A number of individuals disabled by PTSD and other psychiatric conditions report one of their difficulties in maintaining employment is the claustrophobic reaction they suffer when a colleague, boss, or customer comes too close to them. The revulsion they experience is not limited to the workplace of course. Avoiding situations where closeness may take place will lead to someone becoming increasingly homebound. Through teamwork with a service dog, some of these individuals have regained the ability to do their own shopping

and to ride on public transportation. Such teamwork may also enable them to cope better with the risk of close contact in the workplace or at a Little League game, the polls on Election Day and other places which may draw a crowd, helping the partner to lead a much more normal life.

- **Dog is first trained on how to brace himself on a Stand Stay so that he cannot be jostled out of position. Technique was developed by service dog trainers to protect patients with Reflex Sympathy Dystrophy from accidental bumps that can trigger an excruciatingly painful RSD flare-up. Same task can prevent or reduce panic by creating enough distance for a situation to become tolerable. A large sturdy dog is schooled to move into Position (front, behind, left or right side) and to brace for possible impact with an innocuous command, such as “Stay Close.” Dog holds his ground, preventing people from making body contact with his partner while in line or on a bus, elevator or in the same room etc. Enhance the effectiveness of this strategy by asking a person to step back, using dog’s alleged fear of having his paws stepped on as a plausible reason for making such a request.**
- **Dog is trained to repeatedly circle the partner to keep people at a comfortable distance. Short term strategy for backing people off.**
- **Dog of any size can be schooled to move fast into requested Position, usually in front of or behind the partner and perform a quick Down Stay. Must learn to drop with his back to the person approaching or persons in line. Should lie flat on his side or at least on one hip, to maximize the distance between the partner and nearest person. If worried a small dog might be stepped, have him do a Stand-Stay instead, with the tail end nearest to the person to be kept at bay so as to maximize the distance this achieves.**

Arouse From Fear Paralysis or Disassociation Spell

In Parkinson’s, where the person freezes and is unable move, the dog is schooled to assist the individual by making physical contact, such as lightly tapping the person’s shoe with his paw. This apparently is sufficient to break the spell, allowing the individual to resume movement. Reportedly, similar behavior - physical stimulation through pawing or nose nudging, - can rouse someone from a disassociation state, at least sufficiently to make the person aware of his/her plight, thus providing a chance to focus and fight the symptoms. This may also be effective in fear paralysis, another symptom of PTSD. Transforming it from an accidental spontaneous behavior into a reliable skill will require months of diligent schooling and practice. (*Training Note:* Simulate the trance state, then use click & treat or “Yes!” & treat to teach the dog the desired response, perhaps hiring a professional dog trainer to shape and reinforce the behavior. If there are frequent practice sessions in a variety of settings, this training may enable the dog to perform this valuable task whenever the freezing behavior, fear paralysis or disassociation occurs in real life. Alternatively, teach it as a hearing dog alert to a wristwatch alarm.) Those who lose awareness of the dog and their surroundings when disassociating should consider using a Waist Leash or type with a wrist band that can be velcroed to one’s wrist so the dog won’t wander off if you drop the leash when you disassociate outside your home.

- **Dog is trained to nudge handler during freezing behavior to rouse handler from a disassociative state or fear paralysis.**
- **Dog is trained to respond with nudging and/or pawing whenever he hears the beeping from a**

wristwatch with an alarm clock function, which his partner can set to go off as frequently as desired, so the dog can arouse the seated or ambulating partner from a disassociative episode at home or in public. If fully alert, the partner can just reset the alarm before the alarm due to go off, unless he chooses to give the dog a practice session. Could be useful for someone with appointments or classes to get to or other responsibilities, if he or she is responsive to a service dog nudging or pawing when disassociating.

IV. SECURITY ENHANCEMENT TASKS

Not every person who becomes the victim of assault develops a psychiatric disorder with symptoms severe enough to qualify them as disabled under the Americans with Disabilities Act. But those who do become disabled by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) experience the world as an extremely dangerous place. This psychological injury can be just as disabling as an injury which causes a loss of vision or hearing. It amputates the sense of safety or security that most people take for granted. The tasks in this section offer the human partner some innovative coping strategies. Teamwork with a service dog can empower the victim to win back a measure of independence and to resist incorrect and unrealistic responses. For the traumatized handler, a service dog who masters these tasks will be an invaluable ally.

Coping with Fear of Hidden Intruders in the Home

Assault victims who develop post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may find it extremely difficult to live alone or to spend time in the house when other household members are not at home for fear of being attacked again. Others are afraid to leave the house for fear of returning to discover there is a hidden intruder. A state of mind known as *hyper vigilance*, in which all senses are straining to detect where the next attack is coming from, is common to victims of assault who develop PTSD. It can impair the ability to function in a home or public setting. In addition, some of the tasks suggested here may help patients with sleep disturbances such as night terrors to cope better with the fear they experience.

Provide a Reality Check - Who's There?

PTSD hyper vigilance, hypnagogic hallucinations, flashbacks, nightmares, night terror or extreme sleep deprivation from Depression lead to distorted reality perceptions. One isn't always sure whether the voices in the other room or a certain noise is real or is part of the psychiatric disability. It can be tremendously reassuring if the service dog is trained to alert to anything unusual in the real environment. It is essential to hold practice sessions where by pre-arrangement, a friend approaches the house during the session or sneaks in quietly so he or she is standing in the next room when the dog is asked "Who's there?" Knowing how the dog behaves when there is a real cause for alarm can aid in interpreting his reaction at a later date, helping the partner decide whether to flee or relax

- **Ask the service dog, "Who's There?" in excited tone of voice. The tone of voice and body language will encourage the dog to listen and to alert if need be. If nothing is there, the dog's initial interest will wane. He will relax and wander off to do something else.**

- **To reduce fear an intruder may have entered the premises while the partner was out of the house, this “Who’s There?” teamwork can also be utilized when returning home, upon entering the house. It can be immensely reassuring if the dog’s body language indicates there are no unexpected visitors.**

Strategies With a Portable Phone

The dog can be trained to bring a portable phone designated “for emergencies only” to any room in the house. While there are other reasons why this task could be a valuable one, in this particular case, the task could empower the handler to investigate a suspicious noise to hopefully lay her fears to rest, rather than flee the premises. The handler could keep a finger on the button pre programmed to dial 911 as a precaution. The handler also has the option of calling a friend and keeping the person on the line while checking out the premises. If returning home from an outing, the handler could have the dog enter the home and bring the portable phone to the front or back porch. It could even be delivered to the car if the dog utilizes a special doggy door with a lock keyed to an electronic key device on the dog’s collar, if partner does not feel it would be safe to open the door for the dog or approach the porch or deck. This task could mitigate the handler’s overpowering fear of going into the house after work or running errands and prevent the partner from becoming housebound.

- **Dog trained to retrieve a portable phone and deliver it to any room in the house so partner can investigate a suspicious noise, with friend on the line or 911 available.**
- **Dog can be trained to enter the home through a doggy door or another entrance, to fetch the phone and deliver it to the partner who is waiting outside or in car to use it.**

Call for Help in Advance

Having a friend listen via speaker phone to everything that goes on in the house from the moment the handler enters the premises gives extra insurance that police will soon be on their way if it turns out the handler’s fear of a hidden intruder was justified. The dog can be sent to depress the three inch wide white button that dials a pre programmed number on the K-9 Rescue Phone before the handler steps foot in the house. Also a service dog could be sent in the middle of the night to operate the device before the handler leaves the bedroom. If a sympathetic support system is available, this option can help the handler resist calling the police every time he or she hears a strange noise or experiences a feeling of dread upon returning home. The K-9 Rescue phone remains functional in a power failure as it is equipped with a 21 day battery.

- **Dog trained to go to the location of the K-9 Rescue phone and push the large button to dial 911 or another pre-set number BEFORE partner enters the home. If anything dreadful occurs when the partner goes inside, it will be heard by the 911 operator or a friend over the speaker-phone, so help can be sent fast.**
- **Same task, but performed from a different location, requiring the dog to be trained to habitually follow a specific route from the bedroom or other designated rooms to the place where the K-9 Rescue Phone is waiting for the dog to operate it.**

Lighting up Dark Rooms

A service dog can be trained to precede the handler into rooms, hallways or the basement, turning on lamps or overhead lights to reduce the partner's fear of a lurking intruder, when a strange noise or some other stimulus necessitates inspection of the home before the partner can resume daily life activities or go back to sleep. A floor pedal device, a touch lamp device for lamps with a metal base or inexpensive wireless lights to illuminate dark areas if a dog nudges them are some of the clever options available if worried about wall scratches from the dog pawing conventional light switches. A touch pad made for the severely disabled could control up to six lights at once throughout the house and be operated by a service dog.

When the team arrives home after dark, the service dog's ability to operate a touch lamp or other devices can be put to good use to mitigate the partner's fear of returning home to a hidden intruder. The dog can be trained to enter a dark residence by himself to switch on one or more lamps. Not only is the light itself beneficial, the dog's behavior during the performance of the task will provide reality based feedback to aid the handler in the decision of whether or not to risk entering the house. If somebody did happen to be inside, chances are very high the dog will skip the task or rush off to investigate the new scent as soon as he performs the task. This teamwork approach is an option for a victim of assault that is arguably superior to relying on a timer to turn on the lights when the sun goes down.

- **Dog must learn to operate light switches and/or other devices like a floor pedal device or touch lamps. Then the dog is schooled to precede handler into each room turning on lights one by one to reduce partner's fear of a lurking intruder.**
- **Dog is trained to enter a dark home or apartment by himself to switch on lamp(s) to reduce the partner's fear of entering the premises.**

Assist with Escape Strategies - Open Front Door

One option to increase safety before responding to suspicious sounds is to routinely send the dog to open the front door on command, if there is a storm door to prevent him from running off. The dog's behavior during this task will serve as "a reality check," helping the partner to discern if anyone is waiting down the hall or in another room. The partner can then escape using another route if there is a real reason to do so. (*Training Note:* start at front door, move back to room(s) only 5 ft. per week to build up confidence before adding more distance, to ingrain a route from the door to each room. This is how to achieve reliability on any "place command.") If fear drove partner to exit without sending the dog to front door, the dog can be trained to assist the partner to get back inside.

- **The dog is trained to open the front door by tugging on a strap attached to a lever handle installed on the interior side of the Front Door. Secondly, the dog must learn to go from the bedroom and /or other rooms all the way to the front door to perform the task on command, at any time of day or night.**
- **The dog could be trained to open a locked door from the inside on command by tugging on a strap attached to a lever handle. This could enable his partner who exited by a window or another route, to get back inside without needing to wake up a sleeping family member or call a locksmith.**

Fear Management In Public

These tasks for working with a service dog in public settings gives a victim of assault new coping strategies that could go a long way to mitigating the disabling fear experienced as a consequence of the trauma. At the same time, if utilized correctly, none of these tasks will spoil a service dog's gentle trusting nature.

Reducing Hyper-vigilance Through Teamwork

Victims of assault who develop disabling PTSD report success in coping with their highly fearful state of mind, called hyper vigilance, through teamwork with a service dog. The dog selected should have a laid back, amiable, very confident temperament. The dog must be well socialized so he can handle the challenges of public access work in a calm manner. He must be trained to remain obedient and unobtrusive even if the handler reacts with extreme terror to various stimuli, seeing potential threats where none exist. By remaining calm in such situations, the service dog's relaxed confident demeanor serves as a reality check for one whose perception of danger can no longer be trusted. This enables hyper vigilant individuals to more accurately assess the situation and to make reality informed decisions about what to do. Like guide dog and hearing dog handlers who rely on their dogs' body language to enhance their ability to safely navigate their environment, individuals with PTSD report impressive gains in their ability to function outside the home, relying on their dog's training and body language to compensate for the mental impairment they must contend with. Dog may also be taught to do a "Who's There?" reality check on command before entering a parking lot or other feared locations.

(NOTE: When the approach of a jogger or some other innocent bystander triggers the handler's hyper vigilant fear she is in mortal danger, the last thing in the world that is needed is a fiercely protective guard dog who due to instinct or training leaps to the handler's defense with a frightening display of aggressive behavior. Such a reaction won't mitigate the disability by decreasing the victim's hyper vigilant state of mind. Rather it forces the handler to become much more vigilant, knowing this dog is capable of hurting any human whom he perceives to be a threat to the team. Trying to deal with the dog's hyper vigilance as well as your own will be counter productive and exhausting. Furthermore, aggressive acting dogs do not qualify for access as legitimate service animals. Much more could be said on the subject, but suffice it to say, this would be a misguided and dangerous approach to helping assault victims cope with psychiatric disorders like PTSD.)

Keep Suspicious Strangers Away

A dog is a much better crime deterrent than burglar alarms, extra locks and security lighting according to police statistics. Those who wish to enhance the psychological deterrent effect should consider the dog's size, color and breed appearance in making a selection. Studies have revealed people are much more afraid of black dogs than light colored ones. By way of example, a large black Labrador Retriever will have the same gentle temperament but look twice as formidable as a yellow Labrador Retriever. A Great Dane is going to be more of a deterrent than a toy poodle.

This segment describes four tasks which could assist a handler to keep suspicious strangers at bay. However, the tasks are only meant to create an illusion. The dog must be rigorously schooled NOT to be protective in these situations even if partner acts fearful. A service dog should only perform these tasks to please his handler and/or earn a treat.

Actual protection training /attack training is ethically prohibited for legitimate service dogs. A service dog should never be allowed to bark AT strangers in public. The following tasks will provide much safer and much more useful kinds of behavior in the long run than having an over protective dog. These tasks offer a non-violent alternative to carrying a weapon for someone coping with the fear of another assault. Useful as a bluff strategy for other kinds of assistance dogs too. Won't ruin the underlying good natured tolerance for strangers that is the appropriate temperament every assistance dog should exhibit and be tested for prior to any training.

*(Note: Please do not publicize the fact that some assistance dog handlers may teach their dogs bluff tasks for this could have a detrimental impact on the safety of a team. However, it would be honest and acceptable to say to a reporter or write: **“Service dogs can be schooled to perform tasks that enhance the safety of their disabled owners.”** Realize that it is never acceptable to alarm the public, arousing fear of assistance dogs when addressing this topic in a public forum. This is a very thin line that must be walked with great sensitivity.)*

- **Dog is trained to obey the bluff command “Cover Me.” Dog learns to jump up and turn around, standing next to his partner, facing backwards. (It is a Stand-stay obedience exercise with a dog facing in a different direction than usual. A mugger may receive the impression the dog is watching for trouble.)**
- **May also train a dog to turn his head from side to side, while facing people behind you. Taught by using click & treat or verbal “Yes” & treat, rewarding him whenever he turns head to the left. Use the bluff command: “Watch My Back”. Psychologically, with a large dog, it’s a crime deterrent, while partner operates an ATM machine or while quickly unlocking a car or an office door. Dog does not actually do anything more than hold a Stand-stay position, while giving the impression that he is visually scanning the area for possible trouble. After the dog turns his head from side to side, four to six times in a row, reward him, then ask him to repeat it.**
- **Dog rises from a Down-stay position to assume a Stand-stay position next to or in front of his disabled partner. What changes this from a routine obedience exercise to an effective illusion is teaching the dog to spring up quickly when the handler uses a bluff command such as, “On Guard!” To heighten the illusion, the handler should grip the dog’s collar as if the dog needs to be restrained from charging forward.**
- **Dog is taught to “Bark for Help,” on command, or when you snap your fingers, to earn a treat. This vocalizing attracts attention to the team, scaring off a mugger or some other predator, for the last thing a criminal wants is the public’s attention focused on his activities. Teaching the dog to bark enthusiastically, instead of falling silent in eager anticipation of his treat after only two or three barks requires several months of schooling in the home, vehicle and a variety of other locations, before it will be a dependable task.**

Increase Safety in Public, at ATM with Equipment & Teamwork

Criminals are not certain how a service dog might react if a stranger tries to steal something out of his backpacks, something that can work to the team’s advantage. Many mobility impaired handlers put their wallet, other valuables and ID in a service dog’s backpacks for safe keeping, as there has not been a case of a

service dog being mugged since their inception over a quarter century ago. While having the dog wear backpacks is not considered a task, per se, it could allow victims of assault and others with a psychiatric disability to substantially reduce their vulnerability as a potential target for purse snatchers, pickpockets and muggers. If the individual has flashbacks, disassociative episodes or becomes disorientated, the backpacks may prevent others from taking advantage of the individual at such times. Ethical guidelines puts the amount of weight a dog can carry at 15% of the dog's total body weight. The 15% includes the weight of the harness with empty backpacks, about 2 to 4 pounds, depending on its design. By working together at an ATM and check out stands, a handler with a large service dog can minimize any appearance of vulnerability and conceal the amount of cash he or she is carrying, reducing the stress associated with performing this high anxiety chore for a victim of assault.

- **Dog trained to work cooperatively with the handler at an ATM machine, by obediently doing a “Paws up” and “Stay,” to allow the card and checks to be removed from backpack or to permit the cash dispensed by an ATM to be discretely returned to the backpack. It enables a handler to remain in an upright position, blocking ATM’s screen from view, rather than making self much more vulnerable to a mugging by bending down to fumble with the backpack zipper or velcro tabs. DISCLAIMER:** *Please understand this is NOT a task that will legally “count” as a trained task acceptable in a court of law as proof the dog meets the legal definition of a service animal. It is simply an optional extra, a “bonus aid,” which any dog lover, disabled or non disabled, may enjoy. Such items could be carried in a purse or fanny pack, so it is a matter of personal choice*

Author: Joan Froling; Copyright on original Task List February 1, 1998
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