EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMAL

A practical starting guide - comfort is not task training.

Guest article by Alicia Bradley

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

Emotional support animal	Service animal
Comforts through companionship and presence	**Performs disability-related work or tasks**
No task training required to provide comfort	Individual task training required
No ADA public-access rights	ADA access rights in most public places
Letter from a licensed provider who treats you	No ADA certification or registration required

START HERE

- [ ] Make an appointment with a licensed healthcare or mental health professional who treats you.
- [ ] Ask whether you have a qualifying disability or condition and whether an ESA is appropriate for you.
- [ ] Skip instant ESA registrations and certificates. A real therapeutic relationship matters.
- [ ] Choose an animal whose temperament, health and daily needs fit your home.
- [ ] Use positive reinforcement for basic manners. Give a newly adopted shelter dog quiet decompression time.

2026 HOUSING NOTE

HUD's May 22, 2026 memo limits federal enforcement to trained disability-related assistance animals. The Fair Housing Act itself did not change. State and local laws still apply.

Illinois' currently posted no-fee guide is dated December 2023. Confirm current enforcement before acting.

SOURCES TO CHECK

ADA.gov service animal FAQs - HUD.gov May 22, 2026 enforcement memo

IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov assistance animal FAQ - HopkinsMedicine.org petting and cortisol

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The right animal is an individual, not an online certificate.

General information, not legal, medical or mental health advice. Laws are changing.

Talk with a licensed provider about your health and a fair housing attorney or civil rights agency about housing.