



What makes a good Assistance Dog?

It's not surprising that many established Assistance Dog charities use Labradors, Golden Retrievers and Spaniels when training Assistance Dogs.

But why do they use those particular breeds?

These breeds of dogs are classed as Gun Dogs and Gun Dogs naturally like to pick up and carry items. By making use of these instinctive behaviours, it can often make it easier when training them as Assistance Dogs.

So, does that mean that other breeds are not suitable?

No, there are other breeds that have gone on to become first class Assistance Dogs.

But, if you're choosing a dog to train as an Assistance Dog, think carefully before making your decision. Don't choose a particular breed without first learning about the likely instinctive behaviours, any potential health issues, grooming requirements and temperament.

At Dog A.I.D. we know that deciding on the right dog for you should be your own personal choice.

But there are some things that you *really* do need to think about:

- **Size.** Do you want a dog that will be able to sit on your lap and give you comfort as well as being able to fetch items for you?
- **Strength.** Will you want your dog to help you balance while walking?
- **Height.** Will you need your dog to be able to reach door buttons and light switches and things from worktops?
- **Feeding.** Can you afford to feed a large dog a healthy diet?
- **Type of coat.** A dog with a thick, dense coat of fur (long or short, straight or curly) will need to be groomed daily. They may also need to be clipped professionally. Will you be able to groom the dog every day? Can you afford to pay for regular grooming?
- **Temperament.** A shy, timid dog might not cope in crowds or busy places. A fast, energetic dog will need plenty of exercise. Think carefully before making your choice!
- **Insurance.** How will you cover vet bills? Will the breed and size of the dog affect the cost of the insurance?

Breeds of dogs to avoid (if you have a choice):

- **Those that are very large as they tend to have a short working life.** These giant breeds, such as Great Dane, Mastiff, Dogue de Bordeaux, Newfoundland, and St Bernard not only have a shorter working life, but also have heavier jowls than many dogs and so struggle to keep their saliva in their mouths – they love to share it when they shake their heads! Generous, but not welcome particularly in supermarkets and shops!



- **Those that need a lot of grooming or shed their fur easily.** Grooming a dog is time-consuming and for some breeds, grooming must be done every day. If your physical abilities are limited you may struggle to do daily grooming. Professional grooming can be costly so think carefully about the expense of this. If a dog does shed fur easily, it can be difficult to keep your home clear of the dog hairs. Long-coated dogs will pick up more mud and water in wet weather. They will also take more time and effort to keep them clean and dry.



- **Dogs who have been bred for a specific purpose such as some guarding breeds**



Guarding breeds are known for their loyalty but people can often feel intimidated by their reputation and appearance. The true temperament of a guarding breed won't be known until they are 10 – 12 months of age. By then, as the owner, you will be very attached to them. If the guarding instinct is very strong it is unlikely that they will pass an assessment to become an Assistance Dog.

- **Very small dogs.** Tiny breeds and miniature dogs are not easily visible in a crowd. Also some, like the Dachshund can suffer from back problems.



- **Those dogs described as brachycephalic.** These breeds have breathing difficulties and may find it difficult to hold items because of the shape of their face. They also struggle in the summer months when the weather becomes warmer.



There are some breeds which are an excellent choice – like the Retriever/Gun Dog breeds. There are also some which can be trained if you know the breed well and have previous experience of working with them.

Some of these are:

- **Herding breeds.** These can be difficult to train if their natural instincts come into play. They are often high-energy, needing plenty of exercise and stimulation/enrichment to keep them busy. However, they are often very intelligent and quick to learn.
- **Terriers.** These can tend to be vocal and love to chase. They can become distracted by wildlife, noises and fast movements so struggle to focus! However, they are often intelligent dogs with the ability to walk for miles or can make do with a short walk outdoors and stimulating playtime indoors.

If you are thinking about getting a dog to train as a recognised Assistance Dog, please feel free to call our office if you would like more help and guidance or go to the Kennel Club site where you will find a great deal of information on all breeds.

Dog A.I.D. (Assistance in Disability)

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