



## Information Guide

Autism Assistance Dogs for Children



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In this guide we aim to provide you with all the information that you require prior to applying for an assistance dog from Dogs for Good. We have tried to answer as many commonly asked questions as possible, however if after reading this you are unsure then please get in contact with us.

## **Assistance Dogs for a Child with Autism**

Each Autism assistance dog is trained to work in a special harness that connects it to both the Team Leader and child. The dog is trained to lead from the front, acting on instructions from the Team Leader while the child is encouraged to walk alongside the dog using a lead attached to the dog. This offers greater independence to the child and Team Leader, whilst ensuring the child is safe and unable to 'bolt' if they become stressed or anxious. 'Bolting' behaviour is also alleviated by training the assistance dog to sit should the child attempt to run off. The dog also provides a consistent anchor for the child, so they feel more secure in unfamiliar environments.

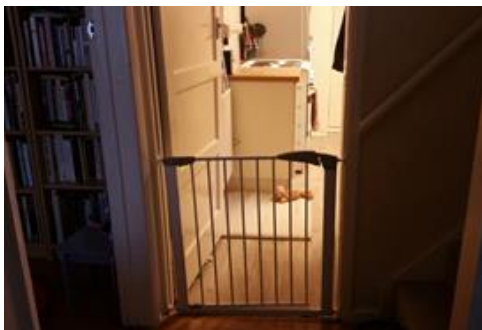
Having unlimited access to public places with the dog enables the whole family to do simple things such as shopping, which may have been impossible before.

A fully trained autism assistance dog can help in various ways such as:

- Introducing routines.
- Reducing bolting behaviour.
- Interrupting repetitive behaviour.
- Helping the child to cope with unfamiliar surroundings.

We work with a 'team model' which includes a trained dog, a child and an adult family member (referred to as the Team Leader). The Team Leader is an individual who lives with the child and will be the main person to carry out the training and responsibilities for the dog. By training a Team Leader to assist with handling, the team is able to reach its full potential. The strength of each assistance dog team lies in the bond created between the Team Leader, child, and the dog. To help build this bond, we provide full training in assistance dog ownership, this includes everything from feeding, grooming and exercise, to the practical work the dogs provide.

The Team Leader is responsible for ensuring that the child and dog are supervised when together and the child should not be left responsible for the dog if alone.



All teams need to have a 'safe space' for their dog. This is an area of the home where the dog can retreat to, having some alone time away to relax without the children, often separated off using a baby gate. The ideal safe space should be located in a quiet area of the home, that is used less frequently. Some people will use a utility room or kitchen for example. The Instructor can advise on suitable areas on the home visit. A suitable example of a safe space can be seen to the left.

## **Our dogs**

We train mainly Labradors and Golden Retrievers and first crosses of the two. Each dog spends their first year of life with one of the charity's volunteer puppy socialisers, and starts their formal training at around the age of 14 months at our Training Centre in Banbury, Oxfordshire. From time to time we

will also train other breeds; however, our autism assistance dogs must be large enough to act as an effective anchor for a child who may have 'bolting behaviours'.

We take the health and welfare of our dogs very seriously and encourage them to be kept at a healthy weight. We understand that it's sometimes hard to maintain a dogs' healthy weight, therefore we work with clients to aid with weight management plans. If no signs are shown that the dogs' weight is decreasing or starting to show signs of loss, we may look for alternatives to help, which could include the dog coming away for a period of time. This is often only as a last resort and necessary if the welfare of one of our dogs is compromised.

## **Our clients**

Our clients and families are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. Dogs for Good is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people, and vulnerable adults. Dogs for Good is also committed to promoting equal opportunities and preventing discrimination. This policy applies both to service delivery and our own employment practices.

We ask that clients provide the details and written consent of two people who live local to them, and can provide support to the partnership in the case of an emergency. This may include looking after the dog overnight at short notice, helping out with exercising the dog if the client is ill for example or providing childcare if the child/children are off school or in the school holidays when the Team Leader will still need to get out with the dog. It is ideal if at least one of these people does not live within the home of the client.

## Training

### Family Dog

Prior to being matched with a dog, we require all Team Leaders to attend a series of our Family Dog Workshops. This is a series of 3 online sessions which are offered as part of our [Autism Family Dog Service](#), covering topics such as relationship building, canine behaviour and communication, and training techniques.

Whilst some people choose to attend this course in order to train their own companion dog to assist them, we also ask Assistance Dog applicants to attend, as the workshops provide an excellent introduction regarding what to expect when your assistance dog is placed with you.

(Please note, the Family Dog registration fee is waived for assistance dog applicants.)

### Training course

Training with a dog generally takes place over a period of 6-10 weeks and is based in the home. Occasionally if we are teaching a number of people at the same time, we may offer the option of the Team Leader staying in a residential facility.

During the course, all aspects of dog handling and care are covered, as well as the important part of building the relationship between the dog and its client. The partnership makes visits to supermarkets, shops and cafes supported by their Instructor, to develop the skills and experience necessary for assistance dog ownership.

Before making an application, you will need to consider the arrangements you may need to make to look after any family members or pets if you are required to stay away. Please note the child is not required to stay away, it will only be the Team Leader.

After the first week of training, an Instructor will visit you 2-3 times a week for a period of up to 3 hours each time up until 10 weeks. On the days in between these visits, you will need to invest a similar amount of time in training with the dog, yourself, and your child. Having time off from work and someone to help with children or other animals is vital. We also ask that your routine is as quiet and flexible as possible in the early days, to allow the dog to settle in.

We usually start to introduce your child onto the walks after about 3-4 weeks. Permission will need to be granted from the school, for the child to come out of school occasionally to train with the assistance dog.

### Aftercare

As the partnership becomes established, visits are gradually reduced to yearly, to ensure the partnership is still developing well, to provide support with any issues that may arise, or to provide further training. Aftercare is an essential part of the Charity's work and an essential part of each partnership meeting its goals and aspirations. We request that children are available to accompany the Team Leader on these visits for the lifetime of the partnership with a dog.

## Costs of assistance dog ownership

Whilst there is no cost to our clients to acquire an assistance dog from us, as with pet ownership in general, there are ongoing costs associated with keeping and looking after an assistance dog.

At Dogs for Good we help where we can by negotiating support from our suppliers and sponsors to ensure that costs like insurance, worming, flea treatment, and equipment are kept as low as possible. We provide the below figures as a guide to the costs and implications of having one of our dogs.

**Please do speak with us if this could be a problem for you or if you need help meeting these costs:**

Application costs	Annual Assistance dog Approximate costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical fee – up to £50 returnable on request if application is unsuccessful (GP fees vary)</li> <li>• Qualification fee - £25</li> <li>• Travel costs to Training Centre in Banbury, or other appropriate venue of the charities choice for assessment/training</li> <li>• Any adaptations required to the home or garden to securely house a dog i.e. an average 6ft x6ft panel fenced toileting run is likely to cost around £80 – £100.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food - £360 (see footnote *)</li> <li>• Vaccinations - £50</li> <li>• Anti worm treatment - £60</li> <li>• Anti parasitic treatment (flea/tick) - £176 (on average £44 per tablet, depending on vets and source of tablets)</li> <li>• Toys and bedding - £50 (at owner’s discretion)</li> <li>• Suitable chew toys, treats, rewards - £35 (at owner’s discretion)</li> <li>• Insurance Premium – Approximately £350-£450 per year (though may change slightly year to year)</li> <li>• Insurance excess – Approximately £400 per condition, per policy year (may change slightly year to year)</li> </ul>

\* All of our assistance dogs are currently fed Royal Canin or Arden Grange food, and we have a direct ordering system in place to ensure that our dogs are fed per our recommendations.

**All the above figures equate to approximately £100-£150 per month.**

## Who can apply?

Any child aged between 3 and 10 that have been clinically diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum can apply for an assistance dog.

People who are either visually or hearing impaired can apply, but should note that our dogs are not trained for guiding or hearing tasks. Our dogs are also not trained for seizure alert.

### Eligibility criteria

We have outlined below the minimum eligibility criteria required to be considered for an assistance dog. Achieving the below does not necessarily mean that an application will be accepted and approved:

1. Your child is aged between 3 and 10.
2. Your child must have an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis.
3. The dog will support only one child diagnosed on the autistic spectrum within the household.
4. Your child must be physically mobile.
5. You must be physically capable of handling a dog, and can undertake an assessment of your physical capabilities and learning skills in accordance with the standards required for owning an assistance dog.
6. It is essential that you attend an information Session at a venue of the Charity's choosing.
7. You agree to attend a series of Dogs for Good's online "Family Dog" workshops in preparation for being matched with an assistance dog. More information about the Family Dog workshops can be found [here](#).
8. If you live in rented accommodation, you will need to provide written evidence from your landlord/housing association that you are permitted to keep an assistance dog on the premises.
  - a. This should include permission to have a dog in your home, as well as confirmation that the dog can use the garden for toileting off lead. It may be necessary for the garden to be made secure and accessible for you and a dog (e.g adding a gate), so permission should be obtained for this if appropriate. This is particularly important if your garden is communal.
  - b. If you move house in the future, it will be your responsibility to check the permissions and requirements of your new landlord, ensuring they are still suitable for you and an assistance dog.
9. You must have access to a secure outdoor area at ground level that can be allocated to use for a dog's toileting purposes.
  - a. A secure, fenced in garden is sufficient for this (fencing at least 5ft high all around), however some clients choose to build a pen in their garden for the purposes of toileting. We will advise you accordingly during your home assessment if we feel that you need to install a toileting pen.

- b. If you live in a property with a communal garden and propose to use that for the dog's toileting purposes, you must have written permission to use the communal area for toileting, or to build a toileting pen 6ft x 6ft (minimum).
10. You must be able to provide a means of feeding, giving water and grooming the dog.
11. You must be able to independently provide regular exercise for the dog as advised by the Charity – on average this amounts to a minimum of two 30-minute lead walks and a minimum of a 30 minute to 1 hour free run (off-lead exercise) each day. This may be longer depending on the dog.
  - a. Please note, if you have a pet dog, there must be one handler per dog for lead walks, i.e. you will not be able to walk your pet dog(s) and assistance dog on lead together by yourself. This may mean walking your assistance dog separately, or having someone else with you who can handle your pet dog(s).
12. We generally require that there be no more than 2 pet dogs in the home, to ensure the success of an assistance dog. At times we may be able to make exceptions (for example if there is ample support from other adults in the home), but this will be discussed on a case by case basis and acceptance of your application is not guaranteed.
13. Dogs for Good does not allow any dogs of any age to be within an enclosed space when someone is using cigarettes and e-cigarettes (including with a window open), to avoid the well documented impacts of second-hand nicotine consumption. When smoking or vaping outside, the dog should be off lead in a safe environment so that they can move away if they choose to do so
14. You will not leave the dog on its own for longer than 4 hours per day within a 24-hour period.
15. You will attend a training course on all aspects of handling a dog and its care. The length of the course, its format and its venue being at the discretion of the Charity.
16. You will be able to attend a handling session if required at one of the centres if your application is accepted, to gain some additional experience with a few of our dogs.
17. If you wish to take your dog with you to work, you will need written permission from your employer to take a dog on site with you.
18. You must be able to provide access to a local veterinary surgeon for routine preventative treatments and emergency treatment.
19. You must be able to provide a 'safe space' in the house for the dog to have rest and respite when needed.
20. Whilst Dogs for Good constantly seeks to maintain the lowest possible costs for an assistance dog owner, you agree to undertake all identified costs relating to assistance dog ownership i.e. insurance excesses; feeding, worming, flea treatment and equipment etc.
21. You understand that assistance dog ownership costs will be approximately £100 per month. Please refer to earlier in this guide for a breakdown of these costs and let us know if this is a concern as there are ways we can help.

22. You understand that information provided on this form will be used by Dogs for Good to assess eligibility for our assistance dog services. Only information relevant to the enquiry will be held by us in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and Dogs for Good will be the data controller for the purpose of this act.
23. We ask for and store the information you have provided us in order to best assess your needs and to meet the requirements for accreditation with Assistance Dogs International. We keep your information secure, private and do not share it with anyone outside of the organisation.
24. Throughout the process of application, training, and then during your working dog's life, Dogs for Good will contact you regularly for updates and information. This is so that we can ensure the welfare of the dogs and ensure that we are supporting you. We therefore expect our clients to remain in regular contact and have an open line of communication.
25. You understand that Dogs for Good is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people, and vulnerable adults. You agree to comply with the Charity's safeguarding processes and procedures.

Please note that as part of the application process, eligibility will also be dependent on permission from landlords/housing associations and employers (where applicable). Additionally, home checks are conducted prior to placing a dog. All application information received will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality and respect. However, Dogs for Good retains the right to use this information for research purposes and in our work with sponsors and accreditation organisations.

## Data Protection

Under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation, we must outline to you and seek your consent where appropriate to collect and use your personal data. "Personal data" means any information which can be used to identify you as an individual. The ways in which we collect and use your personal data are set out in the Privacy Statement attached to the Application Form.

If you are making an application for an Assistance Dog, you are not under any legal obligation to provide us with personal data. However, should you decide that you prefer not to provide us with the personal data we request, we may not be able to provide Assistance Dog services to you.

Most of the information we will collect and use will be directly provided by you, and you will therefore be aware what it is.

We will not process externally or share with others (except in a medical or other such emergency) any sensitive personal data without your prior consent and you have the right to withdraw your consent for us to store and use your data at any time.

We will hold your information for the period of your application and then for a further three months if your application is unsuccessful or withdrawn (to allow you to appeal any decision made in relation to your application), after which it will be destroyed. If your application is successful, your and / or your child's personal data will be stored securely within the Dogs for Good Dogs Databases for the period of your and / or your child's Assistance Dog contract.

## Appeals Process

Dogs for Good receives many applications from people wishing to benefit from having an assistance dog supplied by the Charity. As a relatively small charity with limited training places, we are regrettably unable to help everyone who applies.

Placing an assistance dog with a client is a major undertaking so each and every application is given very careful consideration prior to a final decision being reached.

If you are unhappy with our decision, you have a right of appeal, as described in the procedure below:

1. A letter should be addressed to the Client Services Manager within 28 days of receiving your decline letter, fully explaining your reasons for disputing our decision.
2. Your appeal will be considered by the Client Services Manager in consultation with the Operations Manager and the Director of Training & Development within 21 days of receiving your appeal.
3. We will contact you within 7 days of considering your appeal to advise you of the outcome.

It is important to note that the Charity's decision is final.

Our decision will be based on the information provided at the time of the application. Should your circumstances change significantly you may re-apply, providing supporting evidence of your changed circumstances.

## Frequently asked questions:

If you have any questions, please see [Frequently Asked Questions](#), or contact us.

## Our contact details

Dogs for Good  
The Frances Hay Centre  
Blacklocks Hill  
Banbury  
Oxon  
OX17 2BS

Telephone: 01295 252600

Website: [www.dogsforgood.org](http://www.dogsforgood.org)

Email: [info@dogsforgood.org](mailto:info@dogsforgood.org)

Charity Registration No England & Wales 1092960

Charity Registration No Scotland SC039828

Company Registration No 4416149

## Other options

### Re-homing

We recognise that companionship is an important aspect of many applications, so in some cases we may suggest re-homing one of our older retired or withdrawn from training dogs. This can be particularly suitable to some applicant's needs as a re-homed dog would provide companionship, without the need to adhere to the routines and practices involved with maintaining a full assistance dog partnership.

### Companion Dog

Alternatively, you may consider that a companion dog is suitable for your needs. A local dog trainer can help with general obedience and other training, or you may wish to explore our Family Dog service (see below).

Please note; Companion dogs may not be permitted into shopping centres etc.

There are a number of registered assistance dog organisations in the UK that can train a companion dog for people with a disability, including:

- Support Dogs - 0114 261 7800 [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)
- Dog Aid - 01743 891314 [www.dogaid.org.uk](http://www.dogaid.org.uk)

### Family Dog

The Autism Family Dog Service, provides education through online workshops to give advice and support to train your own dog to help you and your child. This would not be a registered assistance dog but a dog you obtain yourself.

Our workshops help you to consider how to bring your own dog into your life, taking you through considerations of breed / age of dog, right through to training advanced interventions. You will then receive ongoing, lifetime aftercare support from our Family Dog Instructors.

The workshops are aimed at people at every stage of dog ownership, from never owned a dog before and using it as an information gathering exercise to decide if it is right for them, to owning multiple dogs for many years and wanting to get more out of the relationship and advanced training.

More information on the workshops and how to book on can be found [here](#).

### **Other ADUK Members and Candidates**

There are various other organisations that are members or candidates of Assistance Dogs UK, who specialise in different aspects of assistance dog training. The expertise of these other organisations may better suit your needs and goals.

Further information about ADUK members and candidates (including contact details) can be found on the [ADUK website](#).