

ASSISTANCE DOGS



Training journey

by PAWtected CIC

Introduction

Who are we?

PAWtected CIC is a non profit organisation in the UK supporting owners to train and work their own assistance dogs. We were founded in 2017 and have worked with many teams during this time. More information about our services can be found on our website at www.pawtected.co.uk

About this booklet

This information booklet refers to British law. Please be aware that information relating to the handler's rights and responsibilities will differ in other countries.

We have designed this booklet to be accessible and easily understood. For further information, please consider our "Assistance Dog Awareness" course which goes into more detail.

Information

This booklet assumes that you are working with a puppy, therefore it starts at 8 weeks of age. All of the time frames in this booklet are guidelines. Every dog is different and may hit these time frames at different stages.

This is the journey that PAWtected CIC recommends, though different trainers may use different terms or have different stages.

Journey overview

Every dog's journey starts with their mother in the litter. This is a crucial time in development so it's important that you choose a breeder who is going to support their early development.

From 8 weeks when the pup comes home, to around 9 months of age, we call this puppyhood. The development here needs to be the same as any pet dog with a focus on foundations.

As a dog reaches 9 months of age, they often enter their teenage phase and we start to consider them an *assistance dog prospect*. This means they start working on their assistance dog specific behaviour skills and may start going into public places.

At around 14 months, once the dog is starting to leave their teenage phase, we introduce more responsibility for the dog as an *assistance dog in training*. Here they start taking their behaviour skills into public places and they start learning disability mitigation tasks.

When the dog is confident working with both their behaviour and disability mitigation tasks, they will be considered “qualified” as an *assistance dog*. Usually this is around 24 months of age.

Depending on the dog’s breed, they will often work until between the ages of 8 and 12.

Once the dog starts to slow down, it is important to consider the process of *retirement* from assistance dog work. This can be a really challenging stage, but planning can help make the transition smoother.

Focus by age

8-12 weeks

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Socialisation
- Basic manners
- Relationship building

3-6 months

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Basic manners
- Relationship building
- Basic skills/behaviours

6-9 months

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Basic skills/behaviours
- Refining off-duty behaviours

10-12 months

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Basic working skills (pet friendly places)

12-14 months

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Basic working skills in working locations.
- Foundations of disability mitigation tasks.

Assistance Dog Prospect

14-18 months

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Working skills in working locations.

18-20 months

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Refining working skills
- Disability mitigation tasks

20-24 months

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Transferring working responsibility to the dog
- Refining working skills.
- Disability mitigation tasks

Assistance Dog in Training

14-18 months

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Working skills in working locations.

18-20 months

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Refining working skills
- Disability mitigation tasks

20-24 months

The priority during this stage needs to be:

- Transferring working responsibility to the dog
- Refining working skills.
- Disability mitigation tasks

Assistance Dog

2-10 years

The dog should be confidently working during this stage. It is recommended that you have an annual reassessment of skills to ensure that the high standards of training are maintained.

Just because a dog is “qualified”, doesn’t mean that that training stops. You need to be constantly refining and reinforcing their skills.

Retirement

10-12 years

Retirement can be a stressful time for an assistance dog, because it is a big change in their lifestyle. The ideal situation is to gradually reduce their workload over 2 years whilst you spend 2 years training your next puppy.

Every dog is different. Some dogs may need to retire earlier while others can work for longer. Work with your vet to decide when is the best time to approach retirement.

This publication and more are available for
download at:
www.pawtected.co.uk

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