

Support Dogs Autism Assistance Programme

The benefits of an Autism Assistance Dog can be outstanding for the whole family not just the child. The overall aim of an Autism Assistance Dog is to enable your child to increase their confidence and develop their coping mechanisms in a variety of different situations and environments. We strive towards the child not requiring the lifelong support of an Autism Assistance Dog and this is done by setting achievable goals throughout the working life of the Autism Assistance Dog.

How to express your interest?

Please read the information and guidelines enclosed in this document. This provides information to enable you to assess whether you are within the criteria for this training programme.



Support Dogs Information Days take place within close proximity to our national training centre in Sheffield. These are an opportunity for you to learn more about our Autism Assistance Dog Programme prior to applying and, where possible, meet one of our existing clients. Our training staff will also be on hand to answer any questions that you may have.

If you feel that you are eligible and would like to apply to attend the information day, please complete the application form found at <https://supportdogs.org.uk/forms/autism-info-day-application-form/>

PLEASE NOTE a maximum of two people per application are able to attend the Information Day. Due to the content of information given on this day we ask that children under the age of 16 years do not attend.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us at info@supportdogs.org.uk or phone 0114 261 7800

Criteria for autism assistance dog programme

1. The child must have a clinical diagnosis within the autistic spectrum.
2. The child must be aged between 3 to 8 years at point of applying.
3. You are to live within a two hour radius of the Sheffield Training Centre.
4. It is not possible to place an Autism Assistance Dog in a home where there is a household member who has uncontrolled epilepsy.
5. It is not always possible to place an Autism Assistance Dog when the child has uncontrolled epilepsy.
6. The child must not exhibit any fear towards a dog and is happy to make physical contact with one. They are to show the willingness and ability to interact with a dog and form a relationship with one.
7. The child must not exhibit any inappropriate behaviour towards the dog during the interaction. The parent/guardian must be willing and able to fully supervise all child and dog interaction ensuring it is appropriate.
8. The child and parent must be physically able to participate in the training of an Autism Assistance Dog and continue with this when the dog returns home with them. The parent must be able to provide off lead exercise to the dog upon returning home.
9. There must be a 'child free zone' within the home. This is an area where the dog can go if it feels the need to have some space. The parent is to ensure the child does not follow them into this zone.
10. The parent/guardian must be willing to complete written diaries recording their child's behaviour and development prior to and throughout the training of the Autism Assistance Dog. This may include video footage.
11. There must be one parent/guardian who is willing to be trained as the dog's main handler; this person will be required for all assessments and training of the Autism Assistance Dog.

12. YOU CANNOT HAVE YOUR OWN PET DOG TRAINED

13. It is not possible to place an Autism Assistance Dog in a home where there is already a pet dog.
14. The main dog handler is to be available for the required training without the child present initially. Attachment training and further training sessions where by the child is to be present may take place within school core hours, the parent/guardian must be willing for the child to have authorised absence from school in order to participate.
15. Other children within the household must understand that they are not to interact with the Autism Assistance Dog until the child and dog have established a relationship. The other children are to exhibit appropriate behaviour around a dog and not display any inappropriate interaction.
16. A medical report will be obtained from the child's GP and Consultant. NB: Support Dogs will not cover the cost if any charge is incurred for obtaining these reports.
17. Any significant changes in personal circumstances** throughout the assessment process may affect the application.
18. All applicants will be considered regardless of race, sex, religion, creed, age or any other categories protected by law.
19. Due to the workload and commitment that is required if accepted onto this programme we ask that if the parent/guardian of the applicant has any children the youngest must be at least 12 months of age prior to applying.

***Please be aware this includes the parent/guardian becoming pregnant whilst going through the application/training process. If this was to occur it may result in the application being put on hold or withdrawn, you may then be reconsidered once the child has reached at least 12 months of age.*

FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS

All applicants must consider the financial commitments of having an Autism Assistance Dog. The following outlines the commitment of each party:

Support Dogs
Registered Charity No. 1088281

COMMITMENT OF APPLICANT:

- Dog food
- Dog treats
- Dog toys
- Travel expenses to Training Centre for the purpose of training and aftercare visits
- Meal allowance whilst at the Training Centre
- Vet bills up to the excess
- Dog insurance

Funding may be available in full or part for these costs through direct payment

COMMITMENT OF SUPPORT DOGS

- All dog and client training costs up to the successful qualification of the partnership.
- All further training costs throughout the working life of the assistance dog.
- Sourcing/ purchasing of the appropriate dog
- A 24 hours a day, 365 days a support/care line for all autism programme clients. Available throughout the dogs working life.
- Accommodation during training visits
- Support Dog jacket (if lost, a charge may be made to cover the replacement)
- Specific worming and flea treatment products
- Specific vaccines

Support Dog relies entirely on voluntary donations and the fundraising efforts of our supporters. Any assistance you provide with fundraising is hugely appreciated. Please get in touch if you would like more details.

The benefits of an Autism Assistance Dog:

- Significantly increases safety for the child
- Aimed at increasing the child's independence and coping mechanisms
- Allows the parent/guardian to direct the child by commanding the dog
- Teaches the child responsibilities
- Positive changes in the child's behaviour
- Full public access



PROCEDURE OF APPLICATION FOR AN AUTISM ASSISTANCE DOG

1. The applicant's parent/guardian contacts the training centre to confirm a place on the next available information day. NB Information days take place at specific times of the year in order to regulate the amount of applications accepted alongside the vacancies for training. The information day will provide you with details that are relevant to the Autism Assistance Dog Training Programme; such as eligibility, the assessment procedure and what is involved in the training programme. Where possible an existing partnership of the relevant training programme will also share their experience with potential applicants. Due to the content of information given during this time we request no children under the age of 16 years are to be present for the information day. Applications will be available to applicants that are both eligible and who wish to begin the process of applying for an Autism Assistance Dog.

The application pack will include:

- a. Application form
- b. Medical declaration consent form

2. The **application form, medical declaration consent form** and a **recent passport sized photo** of the child and the parent/guardian who is to be the main dog handler need to be returned to Support Dogs by the deadline that was given on the information day. NB Applications that have been received after the given date will not be processed until the next intake of applications are due for assessment. If upon receipt of the application form, if any of the information is not completed the application will not be processed until all of the necessary information has been received.
3. A letter of confirmation of receipt will be sent to the applicant.
4. The application is initially assessed as the first part of the procedure. A medical report will be obtained from the child's general practitioner and hospital consultant. Further reports may be obtained from any other professional person with the knowledge of the child's condition if deemed necessary. NB Any request for payment for these reports will be the parent/guardian's responsibility.

5. If successful following the receipt of medical reports, the parent's/guardians of the child will attend a preliminary interview at the training centre. It is essential that both parent's/guardians (if applicable) are present. The child is not required to attend this interview.
6. If successful following the preliminary interview, a home visit will be arranged, this is to assess the home environment and to assess the child's behaviour when a dog is in their presence. All members of the household are to be present for this assessment.
7. If successful following the home visit, the main dog handler will be required to attend the training centre for a dog handling assessment to ensure they have the capabilities of working an assistance dog.
8. Dependent on the individual, further assessments may be required, this will be discussed on an individual basis.
9. If successful following the home assessment/further assessments, applicants will be offered a place on the Autism Assistance Dog Training Programme and placed on the official waiting list for a suitable dog to arise. NB If deemed necessary provisos may be given at the point of being accepted, to ensure the criteria requirements can be met at the point of being matched with a dog. Please note the application will be withdrawn if the provisos are not met.

Any changes to personal circumstances prior to commencing training may also affect the status of the application.

10. The main dog handler will be asked to complete quality of life reports prior to and following the training of the Autism Assistance Dog.
11. Once a potential dog has been identified, a match will take place. The main dog handler will initially be invited to the training centre for one day to establish the suitability of the dog.
12. If the main dog handler's match was successful, a further match will take place within the home environment to consider whether the dog is suited to the child.
13. If the match is deemed as a success, provisional training dates will be given. In the majority of cases provisional dates are confirmed at least one month prior to the training commencing. Please note in a minority of instances provisional training dates have to be cancelled and re-arranged.

14. The main dog handler is required to attend the training centre for 8 days. The training will take place Monday – Friday, on the first week, and Monday – Wednesday, the second. Please note, times of training will be 10am – 3.30pm. During this time the main dog handler will be taught appropriate training methods and handling styles alongside being educated on the requirements of owning an assistance dog. A jacket assessment will be carried out on the second week to ensure the main dog handler is competent at lone working the dog in jacket.
15. A home placement will be carried out on the Thursday and Friday of the second week, to ensure the dog settles into their new environment and is exhibiting appropriate behaviour around the child. NB the child may be required to have consented absence from school during this time. Prior to the home placement the main dog handler is to ensure the dog has adequate pet insurance and provide a copy of the certificate to Support Dogs.
16. Following the successful placement of the dog, attachment work will be carried out for the following two weeks. A minimum of 5 attachment visits will be arranged throughout this time. NB the child will be required for all of these visits so will need consented absence from school.
17. Further training may be required, this is discussed and arranged with individual teams.
18. The main dog handler will be asked to continue completing the quality of life reports throughout the dogs training.
19. All teams will complete at least 6 months as an 'in training' partnership and the dog must be reliable in their specific role prior to being considered for the graduation. The graduation involves having an assessment in a restricted environment, to assess the dog's behaviour and the handling skills of the main dog handler. The child is required to be present in order for the assessor to consider the dog's role during attachment work. If successful, the team will be considered as a fully registered support dog team.
20. Upon successful completion of the assessment, the appropriate paperwork will be completed; this includes a licence agreement where the main dog handler will consent to the terms and conditions.
21. A progress report is to be completed for the first 6 months. Following this, a review will take place to ensure the team is still working to the standard required of a fully registered support dog team.

22. Further to the 6 month review, teams are required to have an annual assessment. The location of this assessment will be dependent on the circumstances of individual teams. The child will be required to be present for this assessment.

23. Continued support and extra training will be given throughout the dog's working life.