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## **Open Your Class with This Tomorrow** *A Friend Like Henry*

**Background:** Differentiate between the types of dogs that help individuals with physical or psychological difficulties. The terms may not always be consistent among sources, but the following set of broad categories are designed for students to use during a class discussion.

**Directions:** Ask students to brainstorm what types of tasks “service” dogs could be used for and compile a list.

Ask students to create a pro/con chart for the potential uses of “service” dogs.

Have students decide whether they would adopt a “service” dog and be able to support their reasoning.

### **Types of Dogs**

- **Service or Assistance Dog**
  - Trained to perform specific physical tasks to assist a person with a disability, such as opening doors, turning on lights, retrieving dropped items, carrying things, and alerting to sounds.
  - Normally trained and certified by assistance dog organizations and have full public access rights under the ADA law.
  - Assistance to children who have special needs in the areas of vision, hearing, or disabilities other than those such as:
    - Peanut allergies, Diabetes, Autism spectrum disorders, Seizures, Mobility limitations or loss of mobility, Psychiatric conditions
- **Safety Dog**
  - Highly trained dogs used with individuals with severe autism who tend to run away.
  - The child is tethered to the dog, and the dog becomes a protector of sorts for the child.
- **Therapy Dog**
  - Trained in basic obedience that provides companionship but does no specific tasking. These dogs are often graduates of assistance dog organizations and especially suited for this work because of temperament.
  - Owned by a teacher or therapist and is used during lessons to facilitate learning.
  - Normally do not have public access rights and work mostly in the home.
  - Often invited to accompany the child into public places
- **Companion Dog**
  - A family pet with no specific training or certification.
  - Lives with the family and spends most of its day interacting with the individual with autism. The dog can assist with social, emotional, behavioral and sensory challenges in the child or the elderly.

- Do not have public access rights.

### **Pros of Service Dogs**

- **Calm and Social**
  - Love, affection, acceptance, and companionship.
  - Lessens fear of being alone, especially if there are mobility issues
  - Protect, comfort, and calm (or stimulate) you during an episode
  - Leads one out to a safe place when you are overwhelmed
  - Develop relationships and learn to show affection
  - Social magnet, promoting positive relationships
  - For speech therapy, reading to a dog has been proven over and over to provide great benefits. Having a child sit next to a dog and pet the fur while reading aloud lowers blood pressure and other stress factors.
- **Safety**
  - Alert a parent or caregiver to an impending crisis and intervene to stop behaviors by nudging or placing a paw on the child.
  - Alert and intervene during seizures or behavior meltdowns.
  - Alert that people are approaching
  - Locate individuals by scent tracking if necessary
  - Peace of mind about the child's safety because the dog is tethered to the child
- **Assistance**
  - Reminds you when to eat or take meds
  - Will let you know when it is time for bed or time to get up
  - Keep track of keys, phone, etc.
  - Carries wallet and ID for safe keeping
  - Encourage play or exercise
  - Pretend to need to go out when you need an excuse to leave
  - Turn on lights and check a room before you go in
  - Keep you from unwanted physical contact or proximity, e.g., hand money or card to cashier, Walk on the right to keep right hand in use (you cannot shake hands), Put a body between you and nearby people
  - Get help, e.g.: Bark to attract attention to you, Go for help, Dial 911
- **Symptoms**
  - Comfort and distraction from unpleasant medical procedures
  - Motivation for physical therapy
  - Sleep by themselves or sleep for longer periods because of the dog's presence.
  - Wake you from a nightmare
  - Reduction of ritualistic or repetitive behaviors and motions
  - Provide a reality check when hallucination is suspected
  - Interrupt repetitive or compulsive behavior
  - Interrupt dissociation, self-mutilation, or other unwanted states and behaviors

- Assist with side effects or symptoms, e.g.: Brace you when dizzy or unsteady, Help you get up after fall or collapse, Bring meds, water, etc., Bring phone
- Expenses are tax deductible if the dog is employed to assist someone who is physically disabled

### **Cons of Service Dogs**

- Public and Visibility
  - One's disability will be apparent. One will be spotted sooner and get more attention with a service dog.
  - One may be challenged about the dog frequently when you enter premises where pets are not allowed. A law enforcement officer may challenge the use of a service dog.
  - The local school district may be reluctant or even refuse to allow the dog to accompany the child to school.
  - Some people will pay more attention to the dog than the person the dog is helping.
- Dog and Child
  - Allergic to the dog's dander or scared of dogs.
  - Dog's smell, saliva or fur could trigger sensory disorders.
  - The dog and your child may not bond. Or the dog may bond with another family member to the detriment of the autistic's child's welfare.
  - The working relationship between the dog and child must constantly be monitored as well as practiced.
- Dog Care
  - Long waiting lists and age qualifications
  - Dogs are a lifetime commitment.
  - Expensive: vet care for accidents and illnesses, professional grooming, training (classes, books), dog food and equipment (crate, leash, collar, toys, etc.)
  - Limited benefits of pet insurance (typically covers only a fraction of medical expenses, even healthy dogs need heartworm, tick, and flea medication for most or all of the year),
  - Proper care for the service animal is needed no matter how sick you get, e.g.: access to clean water, food, and regular mealtimes, taken out multiple times a day, exercise every day. Someone lined up to take care of the dog when the owner cannot.
  - Limits your freedom: The owner of a service dog must keep reasonable hours; going out right after work may not be possible, spur-of-the-moment trips are dependent on your dog sitter's availability and flexibility
  - Emotional and time demands

### **Pros and Cons Compiled From These Sources**

- <http://www.brighthubeducation.com/special-ed-neurological-disorders/121617-service-dogs-for-children-with-autism-improve-quality-of-life/>
- <http://www.childrensdisabilities.info/therapy-service-animals/therapy-assistance-dogs.html>
- <http://www.servicepoodle.com/pros-and-cons-of-animals-for-people-with-psychiatric-disabilities>

### **Service Dog and Temple Grandin**

<http://www.theautismeducationsite.com/2011/03/25/service-dogs-and-autism-by-temple-grandin/>

In this article Temple Grandin discusses how she approaches the question, “*Should I get a service dog for my autistic child?*” She reviews types of assistance dogs and questions to consider.