

ANIMALS AT THE WORKSITE

Background:

Animals in schools fulfill a variety of roles including offering educational benefits, acting as pets, assisting children and adults with disabilities (service dog) or providing therapeutic support (educational assistance animal). Administrators, staff and parents should be aware of the potential health risks associated with handling and caring for animals. Animals can bite and carry infections that are harmful to humans. Pet dander and waste can also have an adverse effect on indoor environmental quality and be triggers for asthma and allergies. The decision to allow animals at a school or worksite should consider potential health risks to staff and students, animal supervision and care, precautions for safe handling and the educational purpose. Before approving animals in a school or work setting, administrators must ensure the potential hazards are assessed and appropriate safe work practices and controls are in place.

Definitions:

Animal:

is an animal or classroom pet brought into the school for a presentation or approved to be kept in the classroom for some type of educational value, such as a means to stimulate learning and/or teach students about responsibility and compassion through their care and upkeep. The teacher is ultimately responsible for the care and maintenance of the classroom pet within the classroom and to ensure the health and safety of the school community.

Service Dog:

is “a dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations.” (*Service Dogs Act of Alberta, 2009*). For the purposes of this administrative procedure, the service dog definition would include dogs that have been trained by a recognized program such as Canine Vision Dog Guides, Special Skills Dog Guides, Hearing Ear Dog Guides, Seizure Response Dog Guides, and Autism Assistance Dog Guides, etc.

Educational Assistance Animal (EAA):

is an animal that works with its owner/handler as a team to improve a student’s physical, social, emotional or cognitive functioning. An EAA can be useful for educational and motivational effectiveness for participants. An EAA is not a certified service dog. Examples of EAAs are library dogs and therapy animals. Provisions that apply to protecting people with disabilities and their service dogs do not apply to therapy animals and their handlers. Although therapy dogs are specially evaluated, trained and registered for their volunteer work, they do not undergo the same extensive specialized and unique training required of guide dogs, hearing dogs and service dogs.

Hazard Assessment:

is a written evaluation of a situation, task and process as to the potential hazards that staff or students may encounter and the appropriate controls put in place to reduce the risk.

Procedures:

1. All animals

- 1.1. Animals are not permitted at Division-owned, leased or rented school buildings, grounds or worksites. Exceptions may be given for service dogs, educational assistance animals and animals serving a specific educational purpose such as pet therapy, participation in pet days, short-term educational projects or social events.
- 1.2. Before bringing animals on site, submission of a written [Hazard Assessment for Animals](#) (Form 255-7) and pre-approval from the site administrator are required. The assessment shall be kept on file at the site.
- 1.3. The person bringing the animal on site shall be responsible for its proper care, supervision and clean-up associated with the animal. If this person is a young child, alternative arrangements may need to be made with a staff member to assist if necessary.
- 1.4. Classrooms or worksites that include individuals with poor health status, asthma or allergies shall not allow animals that may negatively impact those individuals. Before bringing an animal on site, staff and parents shall be notified in advance to identify any potential health issues or concerns.
- 1.5. The approval of an animal into the working or learning environment shall be determined by the Principal or Director based on information gathered through the hazard assessment and review of the following procedures:
 - 1.5.1. All animals shall be in good health, well groomed, show no evidence of disease and be friendly toward staff and children.
 - 1.5.2. Animals shall be restrained (for example, in a cage or on a leash), appropriately licensed and exhibit suitable controlled behaviour.
 - 1.5.3. Proof of relevant vaccinations and licensing may be requested.
 - 1.5.4. Aquariums are permitted if keeping fish serves an educational purpose.
 - 1.5.5. Reptiles including turtles and iguanas may carry salmonella bacteria and are not appropriate pets for schools.
 - 1.5.6. Ferrets or wild animals (for example, bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, etc.) that carry a higher risk for transmission of rabies shall not be permitted.
 - 1.5.7. Venomous or toxin producing spiders, insects, reptiles and amphibians shall not be permitted.
 - 1.5.8. Young farm poultry and ruminants (for example, cattle, goats, sheep, deer) shall be avoided unless meticulous attention to personal hygiene can be assured.
- 1.6. Animals shall not be left unattended. The teacher is ultimately responsible for the care and maintenance of any animal kept in the classroom and for ensuring the health and safety of the school community.

- 1.7. Animals shall not be left on site during extended breaks or holidays or brought on site by staff during this time as this can interfere with custodial and maintenance activities.
 - 1.8. The Principal or Division can request the immediate removal of the animal from Division property at any time for any reason.
 - 1.9. The Division shall not accept responsibility for injury to or related liabilities in the event an animal is injured while on Division property.
 - 1.10. Animals shall not be allowed to roam free in a classroom or building and shall always be kept on a leash or in the appropriate enclosure.
 - 1.11. Staff and students shall wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after handling animals or animal items.
 - 1.12. Students shall be instructed how to behave around an animal. They shall not tease or provoke the animal or remove the animal's food.
 - 1.13. Students shall be instructed to keep their faces away from a pet's mouth, beak or claws and never to kiss an animal. Unsupervised handling of animals by children under 12 shall not be permitted. Specific areas for animal contact shall be designated.
 - 1.14. Persons with open cuts or sores shall not handle animals. Disposable gloves are recommended. If someone is scratched or bitten, the wounds shall be immediately washed well with soap and water. All those who assist with the handling of animals or wounds caused by animals shall wash their hands after removing disposable gloves.
 - 1.15. A tray or drop sheet shall be kept under animal cages to capture waste and other materials. These materials shall not be permitted to spill onto floors and furnishings. Surrounding room surfaces shall be kept clean to avoid attracting mice and other pests.
 - 1.16. The animal's living area shall be kept clean at all times. Students assisting with this task shall be under adult supervision.
 - 1.17. Cleaning cages or aquariums in kitchens or anywhere food is eaten or drinking water is obtained shall not be permitted.
 - 1.18. Disposable or household cleaning gloves shall be worn when cleaning aquariums or animal cages. Anyone who assists with cleaning these items shall wash their hands well when finished.
 - 1.19. All animal waste shall be disposed of immediately. Animal waste boxes shall not be accessible to students. Feces and waste shall be placed in a separate plastic bag and then disposed of in the outside trash bin.
2. Service Dogs
- 2.1. Parents/guardians of students requesting the support and assistance of a service dog while at school shall:
 - 2.1.1. Complete a [Request for a Service Dog](#) (Form 255-1) and submit it to the Principal.
 - 2.1.2. Provide a letter from a physician confirming the diagnosis, recommendation and confirmation the student's need for the use of a

- service dog in school is essential and directly related to the learning needs of the student.
- 2.1.3. Provide a copy of the Service Animal/Dog Team Identification Card issued by the Government of Alberta. All financial costs to obtain the card are the sole responsibility of the family. Parents can apply to [Alberta Human Services](#) for a service dog licence.
 - 2.1.4. Provide up-to-date (annual) proof of vaccinations, licensing and adequate insurance, and ensure the animal is in good health.
 - 2.1.5. Work with the Principal to develop a mutually agreed upon plan that addresses the handling of the service dog, both inside and outside the school, and the personal care and physical needs of the service dog.
 - 2.1.6. Work with the Principal to schedule training as required for the student's school team and bus driver(s) by the service dog organization, and to educate the student body in the school and those on the bus on the role of the service dog and on the rules of conduct concerning the animal. This process will be ongoing as staff changes, grade changes and other circumstances warrant it.
 - 2.1.7. Provide the school with signage (generally provided by the service dog organization) alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the service dog's presence.
 - 2.1.8. Be responsible for any financial implications regarding the training, use and care of the service dog.
- 2.2. When a Principal receives a written request for permission to have a service dog accompany a student to school, the Principal shall:
- 2.2.1. inform the Director of Specialized Supports of the request;
 - 2.2.2. arrange a case conference involving parents, teacher(s), classroom assistants, transportation staff if appropriate, a representative of the service dog organization if appropriate and appropriate Specialized Supports personnel to:
 - 2.2.2.1. review the purpose and function of the service dog in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student;
 - 2.2.2.2. discuss the notification and involvement of school staff;
 - 2.2.2.3. clarify all responsibilities of the family, school and the Division;
 - 2.2.2.4. discuss transportation of the student and service dog, if appropriate; and
 - 2.2.2.5. discuss other concerns, including potential interference with delivery of an educational program; possible changes to in-class routines and procedures; increased demands on staff; other children and staff who are allergic to animals; recognition of children with fear of animals; and cultural sensitivities to groups that will not share space with an animal.

- 2.3. Development of a comprehensive transition plan for the introduction of the animal may involve the use of social stories and/or visits by the animal to the school/classroom and may also include:
 - 2.3.1. informing school staff, School Council representatives and parents of the potential arrival of a service dog to the school using the [Letter to the School Community re: Service Dog in School](#) (Form 255-2);
 - 2.3.2. sending a specific letter home using the [Letter to Classroom Families re: Service Dog in School](#) (Form 255-3) to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes where the animal will possibly be present in case of allergies, anxieties or other concerns; and
 - 2.3.3. working with appropriate personnel to revise emergency and safety procedures as required to include the service dog.
- 2.4. The approval of the service dog in to the learning environment shall be determined by the Principal based on information gathered through the processes above, as well as a review of submitted documentation pertaining to the:
 - 2.4.1. type of animal;
 - 2.4.2. student's educational needs;
 - 2.4.3. fulfillment of family responsibilities;
 - 2.4.4. fulfillment of school and Division responsibilities to all stakeholders, including liability; and
 - 2.4.5. eligibility for transportation, which is determined by the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and the *Blind Person's Rights Act* establishing the right for the service dog to be allowed to accompany the student on the bus.
- 2.5. At the end of each year, the student's learning team shall review the student's program needs related to the service dog.
 - 2.5.1. The review shall include the school's input with regard to monitoring the service dog's capacity to provide the target service.
 - 2.5.2. Decisions regarding the appropriate use of the service dog, program planning and training need to be considered.
 - 2.5.3. If the service dog is deemed essential, comprehensive transition planning for future teachers, staff, students, transportation providers and the wider community needs to occur.
- 2.6. A copy of all service dog request documentation shall be placed in the student record.
- 2.7. A sign (generally provided by the service dog organization) shall be placed on the doors of the school alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the animal's presence.
- 2.8. The service dog organization shall provide training to the student's school team (Principal, teacher, educational assistant, etc.).
- 2.9. Staff, students or parents of a student with medical issues who are impacted by animals (such as respiratory diseases) are to contact the Principal if they have a concern about exposure to a service dog.

- 2.9.1. The staff member, student or parents of a student shall be asked to provide medical documentation that identifies the disability and the need for an accommodation.
 - 2.9.2. The Principal shall facilitate a process to resolve the conflict that considers the conflicting needs/accommodations of all persons involved.
3. Educational Assistance Animals (EAA)
- 3.1. Anyone wishing to use an EAA in a school shall complete a [Request for an Educational Assistance Animal](#) (Form 255-4) and submit it to the Principal.
 - 3.2. Additionally, those wishing to use an EAA to support children’s programs shall:
 - 3.2.1. provide documentation the EAA is a certified therapy animal;
 - 3.2.2. provide up-to-date (annual) proof of vaccinations, adequate insurance and ensure the EAA is in good health;
 - 3.2.3. provide for the responsibility of care of the EAA, including the need for “bio-breaks,” disposal of waste and provision of food and water;
 - 3.2.4. provide the school with signage (generally provided by the EAA organization) alerting visitors/emergency service providers to the EAA’s presence;
 - 3.2.5. indicate who will accompany and handle the EAA, both inside and outside the school, and what arrangements have been made with regard to alternate handlers when necessary;
 - 3.2.6. pay for any financial implications regarding the training, use and care of the EAA; and
 - 3.2.7. ensure the EAA is appropriately leashed, caged or harnessed while on school property.
 - 3.3. When a Principal receives a written request for permission to have an EAA brought to the school, the Principal shall:
 - 3.3.1. arrange a meeting involving staff to discuss:
 - 3.3.1.1. notification and involvement of school staff;
 - 3.3.1.2. the purpose and function of the EAA in relation to successful learning and/or safety for the student;
 - 3.3.1.3. clarification of all responsibilities of the trainer/handler with the school and Division; and
 - 3.3.1.4. other concerns including interference with delivery of an educational program; possible changes to in-class routines and procedures; increased demands on staff; other children and staff who are allergic to the EAA; recognition of children with fear of EAAs; and cultural sensitivities to groups that will not share space with an animal.
 - 3.3.2. inform school staff, School Council representatives and parents of the potential arrival of an EAA to the school using the [Letter to the School Community re: EAA in School](#) (Form 255-5); and
 - 3.3.3. send a specific letter home using the [Letter to Classroom Families re: EAA in School](#) (Form 255-6) to the parents of students who will be in any of the classes where the EAA will possibly be present in case of allergies,

anxieties or other concerns. Should a conflict arise, priority will be given to the health and safety of the school community and the EAA shall be excluded from that area.

- 3.4. The Principal may impose some restrictions on the EAA for safety reasons. The EAA may be excluded or have limited access to certain areas of school facilities or certain programs for safety reasons. Areas or programs which may be considered off limits for EAAs include but are not limited to laboratories, mechanical closets, custodial closets, food preparation areas, areas where protective clothing is required, areas that have exposed sharp metal cuttings or other sharp objects, areas with high levels of dust and areas where there is moving machinery.
- 3.5. Trainers/handlers where necessary are to carry a minimum of two million dollars general liability insurance.
- 3.6. Staff, students or parents of a student with medical issues who are impacted by animals (such as respiratory diseases) are to contact the Principal if they have a concern about exposure to an EAA.
 - 3.6.1. The staff member, student or parents of a student shall be asked to provide medical documentation that identifies the disability and the need for an accommodation.
 - 3.6.2. The Principal shall facilitate a process to resolve the conflict that considers the conflicting needs/accommodations of all persons involved.

Reference:

Section 11, 52, 53, 196, 197, 222 *Education Act*

Alberta Human Rights Act

Alberta Service Dogs Act

Blind Persons' Rights Act

Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act, Regulations and Code

Alberta Public Health Act and Regulations

Alberta Service Dogs Qualifications Regulation 197/2008 (consolidated up to 34/2015)

[Appendix 255-A Transportation Protocol for Service Dogs](#)

[Appendix 255-B Principal Checklist](#)