



# Dogs and Tags of Wyoming Client Handbook

## Dogs and Tags — Client Handbook

Please review carefully. This handbook describes program expectations, training phases, client responsibilities, and legal/public access information for applicants in the Dogs and Tags PTSD/TBI Service Dog training program.

### 1) Program cost

- We strive to offer services at low or no cost when possible. Grants may be available.
- If there is a cost for the dog, the client will be responsible for that in addition to the \$5,000 training cost. If dogs are available at no cost to Dogs and Tags, you will not be charged for the dog.
- To help defer program costs, we offer assistance-dog training for PTSD/TBI service dogs for approximately \$5,000 total. The program is divided into two 4-week board-and-train sessions at \$2,500 each, with a 3–4 month break between sessions.
- Clients are responsible for purchasing their service vest. You may choose the vest you prefer.

### 2) Eligibility and intake requirements

- All applicants must have a diagnosis of PTSD and/or TBI from a licensed psychotherapist or medical doctor.
- Applicants must provide a written statement from their mental health provider confirming:
  1. the need for a service dog, and
  2. that the applicant is physically and mentally capable of caring for a dog.
- All accepted applicants must sign a program contract and adhere to the requirements in this handbook.

### 3) Ownership and property

- Unless the handler previously owned the dog or purchased the dog themselves, all dogs placed in the program remain the property of Dogs and Tags until the handler completes the program and graduation is approved.
- Ownership transfers to the handler only upon successful completion of the program and final certification.

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### 4) Medical and veterinary care

- Handlers are responsible for all routine and emergency veterinary care for their dog once the dog is placed with them, including required vaccinations and exams, unless otherwise agreed in writing.
- If a dog requires urgent medical attention while in our care, Dogs and Tags will take the dog to our contracted veterinarian and contact the handler immediately.

### 5) Program timeline and final testing

- Handlers are expected to complete the program and pass the final practical/public access test within 12 months, unless extended for medical reasons at the discretion of the Director of Training.
- Handlers will not take the dog into public spaces **that do not allow pets** until the dog completes the second board and train. If a handler takes a dog into public places that do not allow pets before approval, Dogs and Tags may remove the dog.
- After graduation, handlers receive Service Dog and Handler Certification.
- Recertification is required biannually until the dog's service retirement.

### 6) Behavior, safety, and compliance expectations

Handlers must never place the dog in danger or otherwise jeopardize the dog's welfare. Examples of prohibited conduct include:

- driving while intoxicated (drugs or alcohol) with the dog in the vehicle,
- using physical abuse against the dog,
- exposing the dog to criminal activity or environments that endanger the dog.

If staff determines the dog is no longer safe in the handler's care, the dog may be removed, and the handler's participation may be ended.

Handlers must follow their mental health provider's treatment plan, including taking prescribed medications and attending scheduled therapy sessions as required by their provider and Dogs and Tags.

### 7) Program structure and training phases

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All admitted clients must be diagnosed with PTSD and/or TBI and must be able to care for a dog as verified by their clinician.

### Phase 1 — Dog selection and adoption

- Dogs sourced primarily from shelters and rescues will be screened for suitability. As well as Dogs and Tags has people who may donate dogs, and you may purchase a dog from a breeder. **AT NO TIME DOES DOGS AND TAGS RECOMMEND YOU GET A DOG WITHOUT OUR EVALUATION FIRST.**
- Selection criteria include: desire to be with people, manageable energy, desire to please, responsiveness to clicker/positive methods, healthy condition, age roughly 1–2 years, height [complete as needed].
- Once a dog is selected, Dogs and Tags will adopt the dog in the organization's name, and the client will sign the program contract.
- The dog will go home with the client to begin bonding. If it's decided that the client and dog are a fit, training will start.
- If an appropriate dog is not identified during selection, clients will wait until suitable dogs are found and the selection process repeats.

### Phase 2 — First board-and-train (4 weeks)

During the first board-and-train, the dog will:

- learn basic obedience and manners,
- be socialized with other dogs and people, and
- start public outings.

Training methods:

- Positive reinforcement and clicker training techniques are used.
- The dog will be taught obedience and hand signals.
- After the completion of the board and train, we will go over all of the training hand signals and verbal commands.

At-home requirement:

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- Once the dog goes home, clients are expected to train their dog at home for a minimum of three sessions per day. Work on bonding and consistency.

### Phase 3 — Second board-and-train (4 weeks): advanced and task training

- The client will provide Dogs and Tags with a list of tasks they need the dog to perform, such as nightmare alert, blocking, and alert to anxiety or PTSD episodes.
- At this time, a vest must be purchased.
- Dogs and Tags will take the dog into public places such as restaurants, grocery stores, and doctors' appointments to ensure the dog can behave in public and be successful in the final test.
- At completion, the dog will go home, and the handler will practice the skills the dog was taught.
- Clients will learn to read their dog's cues and manage their own emotional responses in public.
- The handler will begin to take the dog with them in daily life for training.
- Staff will be available for any one-on-one training the individual feels they need.
- You will be given a copy of the test to practice.

### Phase 4 — Maintenance training and graduation

- Final certification includes demonstration of tasks, obedience, and a Public Access Test. We will go to 3 places: a grocery store, another store, and a restaurant.
- If you pass the test, your picture will be taken, and an ID and certification documents will be made.
- If you don't pass, we will direct you to what needs work on, and when you are ready, we will test again.
- Biannual recertification is required.

### 8) Tasks and skills trained

- Standard obedience and hand signals.

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- Service tasks to mitigate PTSD/TBI symptoms (e.g., interrupting anxiety/panic behaviors, wake/interrupt nightmares, providing grounding when needed). (Specific tasks are trained on a case-by-case basis and only when appropriate for the disability.)
- Public access skills to ensure safety and appropriate behavior around people and in public spaces.

### 9) Service dog standards, public access, and the ADA

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a service animal is an animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability. Psychiatric service dogs perform tasks directly related to psychiatric disabilities (not merely emotional support).

- Dogs and Tags trains dogs to recognize and respond to their handler's needs— not merely to provide emotional comfort.
- Public Access training and testing is essential: dogs must behave under distraction, show control (no aggression), and perform tasks without causing hazards to the public, the handler, or the dog.
- Aggression is not tolerated in working dogs. Training of protection-type behaviors for assistance dogs is prohibited in Dogs and Tags programs.
- Dogs must demonstrate consistent obedience, attention to the handler, and safe behavior around food, other animals, motor vehicles, crowds, and varied environments.

### 10) Risk, liability, and public safety

- Dogs that behave dangerously or unpredictably will not be certified and may be removed from the program.
- Trainers must balance the rights of people with disabilities and the safety and comfort of the general public. Poorly trained or unsafe dogs jeopardize public access rights for everyone.

### 11) Comorbidity, prevalence, and treatment context (brief)

- PTSD is an anxiety disorder that arises from exposure to traumatic events and includes symptoms of re-experiencing, avoidance/numbing, and hyperarousal/hypervigilance.

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- PTSD frequently co-occurs with other psychiatric conditions (depression, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders).
- TBI (traumatic brain injury) ranges from mild (concussion) to severe and can cause cognitive, mood, and physical symptoms; symptoms may overlap with PTSD.
- Many service members experience PTSD and/or TBI; onset and course vary widely. Early identification and treatment improve outcomes.
- Dogs and Tags is an adjunctive service to clinical care; service dogs are not a substitute for mental health treatment, but can be an important support.

### 12) Special considerations

- Women: service members and veterans may have co-occurring Military Sexual Trauma (MST), which can increase PTSD risk. Dogs and Tags recognizes special needs and will work with the clinician's recommendations.
- Waiting lists and access to mental health services can delay treatment; Dogs and Tags requires active engagement with mental health providers during training.

### 13) Program policies and client responsibilities (summary)

#### Clients agree to:

- Provide required clinical documentation and follow clinician instructions.
- Train daily at home and complete assigned homework.
- Provide and pay for the dog's routine and emergency veterinary care (unless otherwise arranged).
- Purchase the handler training vest when instructed; staff will assist with selection.
- Abstain from behaviors that endanger the dog (substance abuse, criminal activity, physical harm).
- Maintain open communication with Dogs and Tags staff and mental health provider.

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- Allow Dogs and Tags staff to evaluate the team; staff may remove a dog if safety or welfare concerns arise.

### 14) Dog selection and pairing criteria (summary)

Dogs selected should be:

- people-oriented, responsive to training, healthy, of an appropriate size and age, and with an energy level compatible with the client.
- Clients must feel a connection with the dog; trainer and client must agree on the match.

### 15) Removal from program

Immediate removal and program dismissal may occur if a client:

- misses six classes without a valid reason,
- fails to properly care for the dog,
- relapses into drug/alcohol abuse or engages in criminal conduct that endangers the dog,
- places the dog in danger or otherwise violates program safety rules,
- fails to follow required mental health treatment or medication plans as required by their clinician and/or program agreement.

### 16) Final notes and acknowledgment

- Dogs and Tags staff will evaluate both dogs and applicants thoroughly to create safe, effective pairings and ensure public safety.
- This handbook summarizes key program policies and training phases. More detailed program agreements and an intake contract will be provided during enrollment.
- By signing the program contract, you acknowledge that you have read, understand, and agree to abide by the policies in this handbook.

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### Client acknowledgment

I have read and understand the Dogs and Tags Client Handbook. I agree to follow the program policies and meet the responsibilities described above.

Client name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Client signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Trainer/Program representative: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_