

Psychiatric Service Dog Work and Task List

This list is not intended to be comprehensive or definitive, but is merely a guide regarding what a service dog might be trained to do for someone with a psychiatric disability. Each individual has different needs that might be fulfilled in a variety of ways, and each dog has its unique capabilities and challenges.

Many behavior types are listed as “Work or task” because their instances can be cued either by intentional commands (with tasks) or non-intentionally by something else in the environment or person's body (with work). Theoretically, whether an assistance occurrence is work or is a task could be unclear; see PSDP's work and task articles for more information. Regardless of the work/task distinction, what actually matters is the person is getting needed assistance for their disability.

Symptom	Assistive Behavior	Assistance Type
Aggressive driving	Alert to (incipient) episode	Work
Anxiety	Ground handler Guide handler to a safe place Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task Work or task Work or task
Apathy/disengagement	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task
Catatonic behavior	Ground handler	Work or task
Change in breathing pattern	Alert to (incipient) episode	Work
Chills	Pressure and warmth stimulation	Work or task

Delusions	Ground handler	Work or task
Depersonalization	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task
Derealization	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task
Disorganization	Remind handler to perform daily routines	Work
Difficulty assessing emotions	Provide reliable signals to handler regarding emotions	Work
Difficulty initiating movement	Tactile stimulation to "break the spell"	Work or task
Difficulty navigating	Lead handler to important locations on cue	Work or task
Disorganized speech or behavior	Ground handler	Work or task
Disorientation or confusion	Guide handler home or to a safe place	Work or task
Dissociation	Ground handler Tactile stimulation to interrupt or deep pressure therapy	Work Work
Dissociative flashback	Ground handler Tactile stimulation to interrupt or deep pressure therapy	Work Work
Dissociative fugue	Guide home, to a safe place, or assist crossing streets	Work
Distractibility	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work

Dizziness*	Brace or counterbalance handler	Work or task
Emotional escalation	Alert to (incipient) episode Ground handler	Work Work or task
Fear	Guide handler to a safe place Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task Work or task
Fear of leaving home	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task
Feeling overwhelmed	Guide handler to a safe place	Work or task
Feelings of isolation	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task
Fight or flight response	Guide handler to a safe place Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task Work or task

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Flashbacks or distress	Ground handler Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task Work or task
Flat affect	Alert to (incipient) episode	Work
Forgotten personal identity	Give identification documents to others for assistance	Work or task
Hallucination	Hallucination discernment—alert to real people or noises	Work

Hyperfocus	Alert to (incipient) episode	Work
Hyperlocomotion	Alert to (incipient) episode	Work
Hypersomnia	Wake up handler	Work
Hypervigilance	Ground handler Non-aggressively search house/alert for intruders [†] Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task Work or task Work or task
Increase in heart rate	Alert to (incipient) episode Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work Work or task
Insomnia	Remind handler to go to bed Focus/interact until handler initiates sleep preparation	Work Work or task
Intrusive thoughts/images	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task
Irritability	Alert to (incipient) episode	Work
Memory loss	Find keys or telephone Remind to take medication	Task Work
Muscle tension	Alert to (incipient) episode	Work
Nausea	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task
Night terrors	Ground handler Turn on lights Wake up handler	Work or task Work or task Work
Olfactory or behavioral cue	Alert to (incipient) episode	Work

Pounding heart	Alert to (incipient) episode Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work Work or task
Psychomotor retardation	Guide handler using harness or leash	Work or task
Psychosis	Ground handler	Work or task
Racing thoughts	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task
Repetitive/compulsive behavior	Interrupt repetitive behaviors	Work
Restlessness or distractibility	Alert to (incipient) episode Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work Work or task
Sadness or tearfulness	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task
Self-mutilation	Ground handler Interrupt or prevent by alerting or tactile stimulation	Work or task Work or task
Sensitivity to sound	Close door to block noise Ground handler	Work or task Work or task
Sensory overload	Ground handler Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task Work or task
Sleep disturbance	Alert to intruders Ground handler Keep handler in bed	Work Work or task Work or task

Social withdrawal	Initiate desired/needed interpersonal interaction	Work or task
Startle response	Alert to presence of others Ground handler Non-aggressively stand between handler and others	Work Work or task Work or task
Suicidal ideation	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy Ground handler	Work or task Work or task
Trembling	Tactile stimulation or deep pressure therapy	Work or task

*Some listed symptoms may not be psychiatric in origin, but are common side effects of psychiatric medications.

†It is never acceptable to train work or tasks that involve the service dog being aggressive. Similarly, assistance behaviors intended to be perceived as aggressive are not acceptable.