CANADIAN GUIDE DOGS
FOR THE BLIND

AUTISM SERVICE DOGS
INFORMATION PACKAGE

About Canadian Guide Dogs

Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind (CGDB) is a national, charitable organization founded in 1984. The organization does not receive any ongoing government funding and relies heavily on public support and funding to provide Canadians with greater mobility and independence through the use of professionally trained Guide Dogs (nationally since 1984) and we are excited to announce our pilot program of Autism Service Dogs for the Ottawa area starting Fall 2025!

How an Autism Service Dog Can Help

An **Autism Service Dog** can help enhance the safety and security of a child with autism. These specially trained dogs may also ease anxiety in challenging environments, supporting the child's participation in educational, social, and recreational activities.

The impact of an Autism Service Dog varies for each child, depending on their unique needs, abilities, and circumstances.

Some Benefits of Autism Service Dogs Include:

- Increased safety for the child
- Encouraged social interaction
- Enhanced responsibility skills for the child
- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Supported daily living skills
- Greater quality of life for families by spending more time in the community and participating in family activities

Guidelines for Autism Service Dog Applicants

The application process begins with an online submission and continues with a series of interviews, including an in-home assessment conducted by a certified Instructor. Eligibility for receiving an Autism Service Dog and participating in the training program is based on specific criteria, including but not limited to:

- The child must be **between 2 and 5 years old** at the time of application and have a confirmed diagnosis of **autism spectrum disorder.**
- Autism spectrum disorder must be the child's **primary diagnosis**, and the applicant must be willing to provide access to medical records from the family physician.
- The child must be **physically able to walk short distances** and show comfort in interacting with the dog without fear.
- The **entire household** must be committed to the program. Siblings, if any, must understand the dog is a **working partner**, not a family pet.
- The family must agree to a **home interview** and accept that an Instructor will make **annual visits** after placement. The primary handler (typically a parent) must pass **a yearly skills test** to ensure ongoing effectiveness.

- Families must be willing to take **full responsibility for the dog's care**, including providing proper canine nutrition, exercise, veterinary care, and covering all related expenses after placement.
    - While not mandatory CGDB encourages all families to consider pet insurance, please visit https://www.guidedogs.ca/2024/05/27/canadian-guide-dogs-for-the-blind-partners-with-furkin/ to learn more.
- The dog must **not be left alone all day or for more than four consecutive hours**
- The home must offer a **safe, secure, and clean indoor environment** with access to a suitable fenced in yard for free running and exercise. To aid with bonding, the dog may be required to sleep in the child's room.
- The dog must **live in a smoke and vape free environment.**
- At least one parent must be available for a **two-week training program. Week 1 will be in residence at CGDB for the parent and Autism Service Dog and Week 2 will be in the family's home for the parent, child and Autism Service Dog.**
- The Autism Service Dog must be actively integrated into the child's daily life to justify its placement.
- Parents must be able to **understand and apply training instructions** (training will be provided).
- Families must agree to the terms of the **Training Agreement,** including the understanding that the dog may be withdrawn if its care or use is not appropriate.

Autism Service Dog Training

The first week of training will take place at CGDB with the handler staying at our facility and working with the Autism Service Dog. The class starts on a Monday, and the handlers will go home Saturday morning. An instructor will then come to your home on Saturday and place the dog with you and begin working with the handler, child and Autism Service Dog. The in-home training will take anywhere from one to two weeks.

Training finishes with the successful completion of a Public Access Test, as dictated by Assistance Dogs International.

CGDB retains ownership of all working dogs. At this time CGDB will not be training clients with successor Autism Service Dogs.