

Assistance Dogs Europe

Guidance Note on Dog Welfare

Introduction

Assistance Dogs Europe (ADEu) is an umbrella organisation for assistance dog organisations across Europe. To become a member of ADEu, organisations must meet the agreed standards. The aim of these standards is to ensure that the highest possible level of welfare is in place for all assistance dogs and, using the status attached to assistance dogs, to encourage responsible dog ownership amongst the general public. These guidelines are designed to advise members of ADEu on the key elements to be considered in relation to the welfare of the dogs involved in order to meet these standards.

1. Meeting the Needs of the Dog

At all stages, whether in the home environment, in kennels, during transportation or in any other environment, dogs' basic needs must be provided for. These include:

- Plentiful human contact.
Assistance dogs will work with and for people, so during their training they must be brought in contact with a range of people of different ages, races, professions, smells etcetera.
- Environmental enrichment opportunities.
Off-lead exercise every day and free run opportunities.
Time to relax and play every day.

Dogs are playful animals, so it is good for the development of their brain to challenge them in an enriched environment. Such an environment will provide the dogs with opportunities for mental stimulation, interaction, play, self discovery and exercise.

Classical music has a positive, relaxing and calming effect on animals and people. In the same way that stable cows produce more milk when they are relaxed by listening to classical music, so to, dogs will be more relaxed and in a better mood to learn.

- Contact with other dogs.
Dogs are group animals so it is important that they can see, smell and be in contact with other dogs.
- Correct amounts of suitable food, given at appropriate intervals.
Unrestricted access to water.
- Avoidance of extremes of heat, cold, wetness, darkness during daytime.
If dogs are kept in kennels, see the Guidelines on kennelling.

- If dogs are kept in a trainer's or client's home they should be unchained, and have plenty of room to move around and lay down to stretch so they can rest their body and mind.
- Opportunities to toilet
All dogs should have the opportunity to toilet several times a day. It is a good idea, and very convenient for the clients, to train the dogs to toilet on command.
- Suitable daily routines that are sensitive to the dog's psychological and physical well-being.
- Daily care and checking of the dog's mental and physical state.
- Dogs should not be kept in kennels that are covered in blankets or other screening for any length of time. Dogs need to be able to see what is going on around them. Similarly, kennels that are high up or in cars and vans are not suitable for dogs to be in for too long. When kennelled, dogs should be off-leash.

2. Training Aids

Positive training methods should be used (for example clicker method or other positive reinforcement methods) at all times. See Guidance Note on Dog Training. Dogs should be trained to respond to voice, whistle and/or hand signals.

The organisation should not use training aids that inflict physical or psychological pain on the dog and must ensure that the dogs are not abused in any way.

In no circumstances are the use of electric shock collars or pinch collars permitted. Dogs should not be choked in any way.

3. How many years can assistance dogs do the work they are trained for?

The age of retirement of a dog will depend to some extent on the breed of the dog and the tasks that are required of it. Good observation of the working dog is important.

Questions like:

Does the dog still want to please?

Can the dog follow the speed of the wheelchair?

Is the dog still capable standing on his back legs?

Does the dog still understand the commands?

It is highly unlikely that any dog will be suitable for working beyond the age of 12.