

Man's Best Friend: Military Veterans and Service Dogs



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Imagine waking up in the middle of the night, drenched in sweat, disoriented, and consumed by fear because of your nightmare. But then you feel a cool, moist nose nudge your hand. The lights have been turned on and your furry friend jumps onto your bed and sprawls across your body.

For military veterans, interrupted sleep is a stark and unfortunate reality, and it happens all too often. For those with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, reoccurring nightmares are part of a long list of symptoms, including noise sensitivity, increased irritability and anger, always being on edge (especially in public), or loss of interest. Along with counseling and medication options, enlisting a service dog to stand by your side can be extremely beneficial in coping with [PTSD](#).

There are many types of amenities that dogs can provide. [Service dogs](#) are specifically trained to be an extension of their new owner. Their job is to perform tasks that their veteran can no longer do because of the after-effects of war or traumatic incidents. Here are some of the skills that a service dog acquires:

- In the event of a flashback or a nightmare, the dog is trained to disrupt your thoughts with physical contact like licking, pawing, and nudging.
- Help you feel more at ease, allowing you to [open up](#) and be more social

- Deep Pressure Stimulation is the act of using weight to make someone feel secure. The dog will lie on its owner, applying its body weight to expel feelings of anxiety and panic.
- For veterans with limited mobility, a dog is trained to pick up items that have been dropped. It can also fetch a medication bag, a drink, or emergency contact list. The dog can even be programmed to remind you when it's time to take your medication or stay on your workout regimen
- Out in public, when hyper vigilance can set in, a dog will watch your blind spots and stand at attention so you feel safe and guarded.

Service dogs and the [required training](#) they receive offer innumerable benefits. Here are some of the ways that having a service dog can help:

- Reduce thoughts of suicide and hopelessness
- Prevent mental breakdowns
- Save trips to the psychiatrist, keeping your pockets a little fuller in the process
- Make you feel safe
- Give you a sense of belonging
- Provide a focus for your love and care, and offer you love and care
- Avoidance of substances like drugs and alcohol to cope, resulting in decreased risk of substance abuse and violence
- Ability to reacclimatize to daily life with school, work, and family

A service dog must have the ability to perform in high pressure situations, learn the tendencies and needs of their owner, and maintain calm, even in the most exciting circumstances to ensure the safety and ease of their veteran. Their very purpose is to serve you and satisfy your needs.