



AUTISM DOGS®  
CHARITY

AUTISM ASSISTANCE  
DOG PROGRAMME FOR  
AUTISTIC PEOPLE

# Assistance Dog Programme Guide

# Introduction

## Welcome to the Autism Assistance Dog Programme



This guidebook aims to lead you through each phase of the process, providing clarity and understanding so you and your family feel confident every step of the way.

We are here not only to provide assistance dogs but also to support you and create a community that helps each other grow.

An Autism Assistance Dog can help intervene challenging behaviours, provide comfort during difficult moments, and increase independence, helping the handler to lead a more fulfilling life.

With years of experience, our team is committed to guiding you every step of the way.

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# Application Process



## Step-by-Step Guide to Joining the Programme

### Initial Application

The journey starts with completing an online form to provide us with some background information about the handler and their needs. This helps us understand whether an Autism Assistance Dog is right for you.

### Initial Interview

Once the online form is reviewed, we will arrange an interview, which usually takes place either at our main location in Cheshire in a Scottish or London location. This will be with two members of our team and is designed to learn more about your specific needs and how an assistance dog might help.

### Zoom Interviews

Clients who progress past the initial interview will have a follow-up Zoom interview with our CEO, Caroline Preston. This ensures all necessary details are covered, and your questions are answered. In some cases, a **second Zoom interview** is held with our psychotherapy team if there are any underlying issues to explore.

### Enrolment

Once accepted, the admin team will finalise your enrolment in the Assistance Dog Programme. You will then officially be part of our community and can begin this exciting journey.

# Psychotherapy & Behavioural Support

As part of the Autism Assistance Dog Programme, we offer dedicated support to help families prepare for their assistance dog's arrival by addressing behavioural, communication, and mental health concerns.

This is an essential step to ensure the dog integrates seamlessly into family life and maximises the positive impact on the handler.

## Assessment Session (90 minutes)

This initial 90-minute session helps us understand your current family dynamics and how we can best support you as you prepare for your assistance dog's arrival. During this session, we will discuss your family's unique needs and explore strategies to help make the transition smoother.

## Coping Mechanisms (3 x 1-hour sessions)

These three 1-hour sessions, delivered over a three-month period, focus on understanding and addressing autism-related behaviours. The goal is to equip your family with effective coping strategies in preparation for the dog's arrival. The sessions cover a range of areas, including:

- Autism-specific behaviours.
- Communication challenges within the family.
- Mental health concerns that may impact the dog-handler relationship.

## Delivered by Experts

These sessions are delivered by a Qualified Psychotherapist and an Education and SEN Behaviour Specialist, ensuring that your family receives expert guidance tailored to your specific needs.

# Timeline\* Overview

\* Timeline are subject for some change depending on resources

## Milestones on Your Path to an Assistance Dog

### Week 1

Our admin team will enrol you and provide access to support resources.

### Months 1-5

Complete profiling and join private online groups to connect with other families.

### Months 4-5

Meet other families online to share experiences and support.

### Months 6-9

Begin therapy and behavioural sessions to prepare for working with your dog.

### Months 10-11

Meet your assistance dog candidate during match appointment.

### Months 11-13

Attend three farm visits for playdates and sleepovers to bond with your dog.

### Month 14

Participate in Family Training over 4 days at our HQ. Join online delivery panel of existing families for useful tips.

### Month 14

Delivery of your assistance dog following 3 days of delivery training.

### Months 16-18

Receive remote aftercare to help you and your dog settle in.

### Months 18-ongoing

Attend aftercare clinics at our farm for direct guidance and community support.

# Engaging Experiences to Build Bonds

Strong and trusting bond between the handler and the Autism Assistance Dog is essential for a successful partnership.

Our Programme includes multiple engaging experiences designed to nurture your bond in a supportive and positive environment.



Here's what to expect:

## Visits to the Farm:

- Advanced task list design appointment to help determine the tasks your dog will learn
- Match appointment is where you meet your potential assistance dog.
- You will attend 3 playdates to bond with your dog during 1-2+ hour sessions.
- Family training spans 4 days to prepare for life with your assistance dog.

## Offsite:

- Delivery training takes place over 3 days in your home.
- Aftercare support begins the day your dog is delivered.
- Top-up clinics are held quarterly at HQ to ensure ongoing progress.

# Advanced Task List Design Appointment

## What Happens During Advanced Task List Appointment:

### Task Discussions:

You and qualified staff member will go through the specific challenges that the handler faces and identify the advanced tasks that the dog will be trained to help with. This can include deep pressure therapy for sensory overloads, intervening harmful behaviours, or practical tasks like fetching items.

### Meet Potential Dogs:

You may also meet several of our dogs. Our staff will introduce each dog, and you will have a chance to interact with them. You might be able to walk a few dogs around the farm to get a feel for your future assistance dog.

#### Location:

This appointment takes place at Millpool Farm, in Congleton, Cheshire. Specifically, it is held in the farm's front room, which provides a comfortable setting for focused discussion.

#### Day and Timing:

Appointments are typically scheduled on Mondays, with flexibility as per availability. They are usually set in the late morning or early afternoon.



# Match Appointment

## What Happens During Match Appointment:

### Introduction:

You will be introduced to candidate assistance dog we believe is a good match. This involves letting the dog approach each family member at its own pace.

### Interaction with Pets:

If you have a family pet, this is the time to bring them to meet the assistance dog. The interaction between the assistance dog and your pet will be carefully monitored to ensure compatibility.

### Observation and Bonding:

The team will guide the initial interaction, helping you understand the dog's body language and ensuring that the handler feels comfortable. Activities may include gentle play, lead walking around the farm, and some basic commands to start building communication.

### Decision Making:

If all interactions are positive, and both the handler and the team are confident, this dog will be officially assigned to your family. The dog will then begin specific advanced training based on the tasks discussed in the advanced task appointment.

#### Staff Involved:

This session is facilitated by one or more senior team members, including the Lead Trainer, Advanced Task Coordinator & Trainer, CEO, or the Managing Director. Each team member is experienced in observing initial interactions to ensure the match is comfortable for the family and the dog.

#### Day and Timing:

Match appointments generally take place on Mondays or Tuesdays. They are set during the middle of the day to ensure there's enough time for observation and adjustments if needed.

#### Location:

It is typically held at Millpool Farm in the front room, a comfortable space that allows for relaxed interactions between the family and the dog.

# Playdates



## What Happens During Playdates:

### Cuddling and Play

These playdates are all about relaxed and positive interactions, including cuddling, throwing balls, and engaging in simple games that the dog and handler enjoy.

### Walking and Lead Training

You'll practise lead walking, learning how to guide and communicate effectively with the dog. This activity occurs in the paddocks or on walking trails around the farm, offering a mix of controlled and natural settings.

### Sleepover Bonding

At least one playdate will include an overnight stay in accommodation close to the farm. During the overnight visit, the handler and family will have extended bonding time with the dog, helping deepen the connection. It's essential to ensure that your accommodation is dog-friendly and within 20 minutes of the farm for easy access.

### Sensory Equipment

We provide sensory equipment during playdates to help with the handler's comfort, including weighted blankets and calming tools, ensuring that the sessions remain comfortable and positive for everyone.

#### Day and Timing:

Playdates are typically arranged on Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, or Wednesdays. This scheduling helps accommodate different family schedules, providing flexibility.

#### Staff Involved:

Playdates are managed by the Playdate & Family Support Trainers, each bringing their expertise in canine bonding and family support.

#### Location:

These sessions take place across various settings at Millpool Farm, including:

- The front room for initial settling in
- The training room for structured activities
- The playdate room for a more relaxed, sensory-friendly space
- Paddocks and offsite walking trails for outdoor activities

# Family Training and Dog's Delivery

Family Training and Dog's Delivery are among the programme's most critical phases.



These trainings ensure that all family members are prepared to welcome the Autism Assistance Dog into their home and provide the foundational skills necessary for integrating the dog into daily life.

## Here's what to expect:

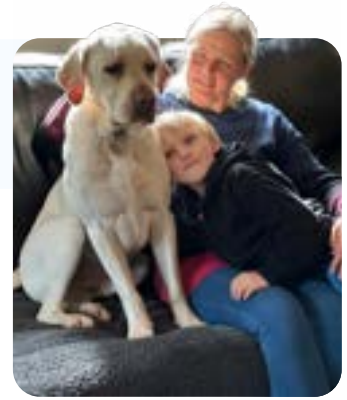
### Visits to the Farm:

- 4-Day Family Training: Comprehensive sessions at our farm to teach you how to care for and work with your dog.

### Offsite:

- 3-Day Dog's Delivery Training: Practical training in your home and local environment to smoothly integrate your dog into daily life.

# Family Training



## What Happens During Family Training over 4 days:

### Practical Modules:

Held at our HQ, local dog park, supermarket and restaurant. These sessions include activities like grooming, lead walking, and practising commands in real-world environments. During practical training, you will have the dog with you overnight to begin developing a consistent care routine.

### Theory Modules

Conducted either in-person or on Zoom, these sessions help you understand the psychology behind canine behaviours, how to build a trusting relationship, and how to handle situations that may arise, such as in public spaces or during sensory overloads.

### Bonding and Hands-On Time

The focus is on ensuring all family members (including primary carers and anyone who may occasionally care for the dog) are comfortable and confident in handling the dog. Activities include walking, playing, grooming, and learning how to interact with the dog.

#### Day and Timing:

Family training is conducted over a 4-day period, typically on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. This schedule allows for both theory and practical components to be taught in a structured manner.

#### Staff Involved:

The Lead Trainer and the Advanced Task Coordinator & Trainer lead the practical modules.

Theoretical modules are conducted by the Managing Director, CEO, and the Training Specialist.

#### Location:

The training can take place in multiple settings:

- The front room at Millpool Farm for practical training
- Offsite (local dog park, supermarket and restaurant)
- Sessions on Zoom for theory modules, allowing for flexible learning that can fit into the family's schedule

# Delivery Training



## What Happens During Delivery Training over 3 days:

### In-Home Training

The trainer will help introduce the dog to its new home environment, ensuring the dog knows where it can sleep, eat, and go to relieve itself. Guidance is provided on establishing routines that help the dog feel secure.

Families will also be shown the advanced tasks the dog has been trained to perform, tailored to their specific needs.

### Local Area Training

Together, you and the trainer will take the dog on walks in your neighbourhood, exploring typical routes to help the dog become familiar with the area. You will practise public access skills, including visiting local parks, shops, or other environments where the handler and dog frequently go.

### Problem-Solving and Adjustment

During these three days, the trainer will assist with any immediate challenges. This could involve introducing the dog to household noises, meeting new people, or adjusting to local sensory stimuli. Delivery trainer will help troubleshoot these issues to ensure a smooth settling-in period.

#### Staff Involved:

The Delivery & Aftercare Specialist or the Lead Trainer conduct the training, both of whom specialise in helping dogs adapt to new environments and guiding families through this critical period.

#### Location:

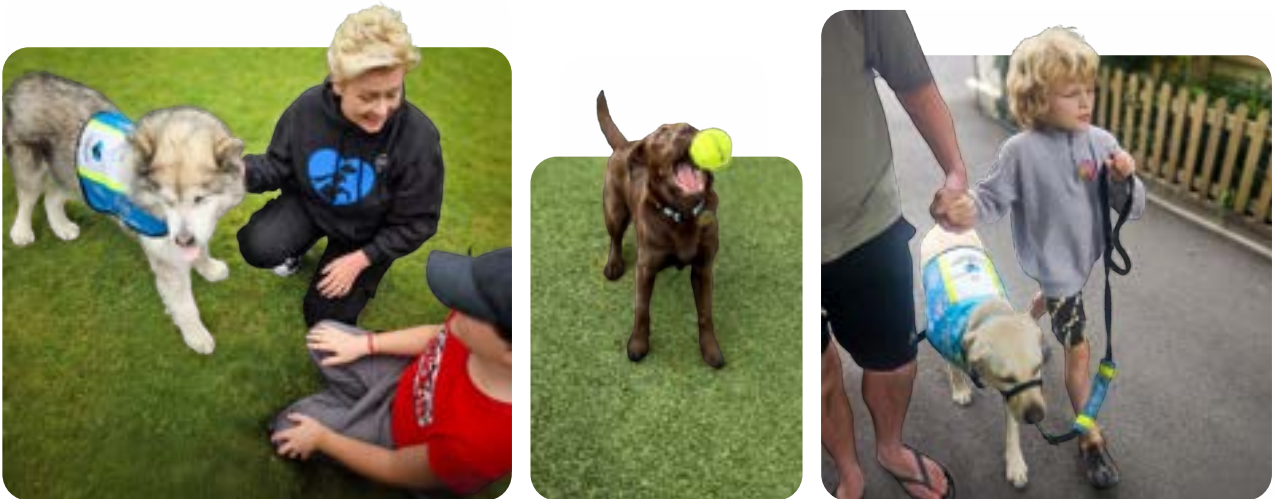
Your home and local community. The trainer will visit your home, taking time to introduce the dog to every aspect of its new environment.

#### Day and Timing:

Delivery training begins the day the dog is delivered to your home and lasts for three consecutive days. This approach allows the dog to acclimate gradually while maintaining consistency.

# Aftercare Support

The Aftercare Support phase is a crucial part of the Autism Assistance Dog Programme, designed to ensure the long-term success of the partnership between the handler, family, and the assistance dog.



Aftercare ensures that the handler and family receive ongoing guidance, support, and training to nurture their relationship with the assistance dog. This phase provides the tools needed to address any challenges, further develop the dog's skills, and ensure both the handler and dog are thriving.

It's normal to encounter difficulties in the first few weeks or even months as you, your family, and the assistance dog adjust and practise skills together.

Our team is here to help guide you through this process, ensuring a positive transition and building a strong, lasting bond.

# Aftercare Support Overview



## Initial Six Weeks After Delivery:

You will have weekly check-in calls with a dedicated member of our aftercare team. These 30-minute sessions are designed to provide answers to questions, help solve emerging issues, and ensure the dog is settling into its new environment smoothly. The call will usually cover:

- **Review of Routines:** Ensuring that the dog's daily routine—feeding, exercising, relieving itself—is well established and consistent.
- **Behavioural Support:** Addressing any behavioural issues that might arise, such as adjusting to household noises or other pets.
- **Training Adjustments:** Providing any necessary adjustments to the training techniques to accommodate the handler's needs and the dog's responses.

## Monthly check-ins:

During these monthly check-ins, progress reports will be created to track milestones reached by the handler and the assistance dog. These reports help ensure the dog's skills continue to meet the handler's evolving needs.

## Annual Updates and Vet Records:

To ensure the continued well-being of the assistance dog and the effectiveness of the partnership, annual updates are required for each working team. These updates include a review of the handler-dog relationship and any ongoing training needs. Additionally, up-to-date vet records, including health checks and vaccinations, must be submitted annually to maintain the dog's health and working status.

## Aftercare Clinics:

Aftercare clinics provide in-person support where handlers and their assistance dogs can receive additional training, address any challenges, and ensure the dog's skills continue to meet the handler's needs.

# Ongoing Support & Communication

We ensure continuous support with open communication and a community of families, so help is always just a call or message away.



## Open Lines of Communication:

The Autism Dogs Charity is committed to providing continuous support, not just during planned visits and clinics. If you face challenges with your assistance dog, you can reach out to the aftercare team at any time. This ensures that help is just a call away.

## Support Group:

Families are also given access to a private Family Facebook and WhatsApp Groups where you can connect with others who are also part of the programme. This group is a great source of peer support, shared experiences, and community bonding.



Super Dogs! - for Autism Dogs Charity families  
Private group



Autism Dogs Socials Community 🐾

# Guidance & Requirements

## Accommodation for Visits:

During farm visits for playdates or family training, families may be required to stay overnight with their future assistance dog to help foster the bond. In these cases, it's essential to book accommodation within 20 minutes of the farm. This proximity ensures quick access in case of any emergencies involving the dog, ensuring a smooth and safe bonding experience.

## Dog Welfare and Care:

The dog must be cared for by an adult or third party who does not work full-time outside of the home. The dog's welfare includes regular health checks, sufficient exercise, proper grooming, and consistent, loving attention.

## Environmental Considerations:

The home should be a stable environment without unmanaged behavioural issues from other pets. The assistance dog thrives in an environment that is predictable and calm.

## Commitments:

Families must be prepared for the ongoing costs of caring for an assistance dog, including:

- Insurance: Public liability insurance for the dog.
- Vet Care: Regular health check-ups, treatments, and vaccinations.
- Food and Equipment: quality dog food, grooming supplies, and bedding.
- Identification Equipment: The handler must ensure the assistance dog wears the branded vest during public outings and keeps it in good condition.

# FAQ

## **Can We Travel with Our Assistance Dog?**

Yes, assistance dogs are trained for public access, which includes travelling on various types of public transport. We provide guidance on managing travel, including unique scenarios such as flights.

## **What Happens if My Assistance Dog Becomes Ill or Cannot Continue Its Duties?**

Autism Dogs Charity will provide support and advice should your assistance dog's health prevent it from fulfilling its duties. Depending on the situation, a successor dog may be arranged.

## **What Happens if There Are Issues with the Dog's Behaviour?**

If behaviour issues arise, our team offers support through weekly or monthly check-ins. If needed, you can also attend one of our aftercare clinics to receive more in-depth help.

## **Is There an Age Limit for the Handler?**

The programme accepts handlers from the age of 4 years and older. However, adult supervision and care for the dog are required, regardless of the handler's age.

## **What if I Need Extra Training After Delivery?**

After delivery, if you find specific areas that need more attention, we provide remote or in-person sessions based on your requirements to ensure the relationship between the family and dog remains strong.





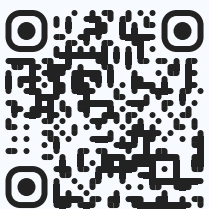
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