

## Disability Support Resources (DSR) Guidelines for Assistance Animals

**Grand Valley State University (GVSU)** provides reasonable accommodations to housing residents with a documented disability. This policy governs the use of assistance animals in University housing. The definitions of service/assistance animals are by the [University's Service Animal Policy](#).

### Definitions

#### Service Animal

The University recognizes "Service Animals," as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA). Pursuant to that law, a service animal is defined as any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.

Service animals are not required to register with Disability Support Resources (DSR) unless the resident requires housing. However, the individual can voluntarily register the animal in the event of an emergency evacuation.

In situations where it is not obvious that the dog is a service animal, staff may ask only two specific questions:

- 1). Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
- 2). What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

Staff are not allowed to request any documentation for the dog, require that the dog demonstrate its task, or inquire about the nature of the person's disability. Service animals are not required to wear a vest, ID tag, or specific harness.

Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals for the purposes of this definition. The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the handler's disability. The crime deterrent effects of an animal's presence and the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship do not constitute work or tasks for the purposes of this definition.

***Service and assistance animals are required to be at least 12-months of age unless an exception to this requirement has been approved by DSR.***

## Emotional Support, Assistance, or Therapy Animals

Recognized under the Fair Housing Act, an assistance animal is not a pet. It is an animal that works, provides assistance, performs tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability, or provides emotional support that alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person's disability. Assistance animals do not need to be trained, certified, or licensed by any entity or program. Any animal prescribed by a doctor or other medical professional to assist a person with a disability can be an assistance animal. Assistance Animals are not considered Service Animals under the ADA and are not provided the same protections.

## Miniature Horse

GVSU shall make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures to permit the use of a miniature horse by an individual with a disability if the miniature horse has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of the individual with a disability. Other requirements that apply to service animals shall also apply to miniature horses.

## Animals in Housing

Requests to have an assistance animal in campus housing are considered requests for accommodation and will be reviewed on an individualized basis. Individuals making requests must establish that they experience a documented disability and must also verify that the animal is indeed providing essential therapeutic benefits related to the documented disability. A resident who requires the use of an assistance animal in University Housing must identify and register with DSR at least **30 days** before housing for the animal is needed. The process typically takes between 7 to 21 days to approve and process all paperwork depending on the circumstances. GVSU is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to housing residents with documented disabilities.

The Assistance Animal must be contained within the resident's assigned living-learning center, except to the extent the resident is taking the animal out for natural relief. When the Assistance Animal is outside the resident's private living quarters, the animal must be in an animal carrier or controlled by a leash or harness. The Assistance Animal is not permitted in other areas of the University (e.g., other living-learning center or apartment buildings, dining facilities, academic buildings, athletic buildings and facilities, classrooms, labs, libraries, etc.)

## Service Animals in Housing

A resident utilizing a service animal in housing is strongly encouraged but not required to identify and register with DSR. This will enable the University to appropriately plan for the animal's presence in housing and provide the resident with information about the full range of disability services provided by DSR.

Students wishing to utilize a service dog in training in Housing must first register with DSR and seek approval through the reasonable accommodation process, before bringing the animal to campus.

## Emotional Support, Assistance, or Therapy Animals in Housing

1. A resident desiring the use of an assistance animal in University Housing must identify and register with Disability Support Resources (DSR) in advance, (preferably at least 30 days) before housing for the animal is needed. NOTE: You must request approval for an assistance animal each academic year with updated documentation to DSR. If an animal is on campus without approval (**DSR memo**), the animal must be removed immediately.
2. Students must notify DSR of the need for an assistance animal at a minimum of 30 days after receiving their housing assignment to ensure that roommate agreement and conflicting disabilities will not delay approval. Each request will be reviewed on an individualized basis.
3. It is the responsibility of the individual to provide appropriate documentation, including the age and type of animal. A puppy is different than a dog, and a kitten is different than a cat.
4. All assistance animals must have an annual clean bill of health from a licensed veterinarian, documented by vaccination documentation, medical history records, or written statement from a veterinarian in the county of residence according to the State of Michigan requirements.
5. The University reserves the right to request documentation that the assistance animal is licensed and vaccinated and to have the animal examined by a licensed Michigan veterinarian of its choosing.
6. Assistance animals are limited to University housing. Assistance animals are not allowed in campus food service or food preparation areas, nor are they permitted in classrooms or offices.
7. The resident receiving approval for an assistance animal will be expected to adhere to the same housing and student code policies as all other students. Students must receive a DSR-issued "memo" as proper documentation of approval for an assistance animal. The animal must not arrive on campus without approval. Students without authorization will be fined up to **\$250.00**.
8. DSR and/or housing may place other reasonable conditions or restrictions on animals depending on the characteristics and nature of the animal.
9. The owner is responsible for ensuring that all animals are contained in a crate or cage within their living center. This guideline includes all animal types when the resident is absent, including attending classes or other activities to prevent health, safety, or escape risks.

### Approval Process

1. Documentation of a disability: (Documentation should support that your condition rises to the level of a disability, that is, that it limits one or more major life activities (according to the Fair Housing Authority), and clearly states how the assistance animal will alleviate the symptoms of the disability (preferably at least **30 days**) before housing for the animal is needed.
2. A signed letter, on professional letterhead, from the individual's health care provider stating:
  - The nature of the disabling condition or impairment (**the student must have a disability**);
  - The animal is necessary or required to afford the person with a disability an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling;
  - There is an identifiable relationship or nexus between the disability and the assistance the animal provides; and
  - The type of animal.

3. The Assistance Animal must be contained within the resident's privately assigned individual living quarters (room, suite, apartment) except to the extent the resident is taking the animal out for natural relief. When the Assistance Animal is outside the resident's private living quarters, the animal must be in an animal carrier or controlled by a leash or harness. The animal must only be with the owner in University Housing. The Assistance Animal is not permitted in other areas of the University (e.g., other residence halls or apartment buildings, dining facilities, academic buildings, athletic buildings and facilities, classrooms, labs, libraries, etc.)
4. The letter of documentation can be faxed to 616-331-3880 or scanned and emailed to [dsrgvsu@gvsu.edu](mailto:dsrgvsu@gvsu.edu).
5. DSR will validate the need for approved accommodations and work with the individual and campus officials to facilitate a supportive network.
6. DSR may deny a request for an Assistance Animal in housing if the presence of the animal:
  - Poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others
  - Would cause substantial physical damage to the property of others;
  - Would pose an undue financial and administrative burden; or
  - Would fundamentally alter the nature of housing operations.
7. Once DSR approves documentation, the student's use of an assistance animal will be validated by a temporary DSR-issued "memo" for documentation of the request. Please note renewal each year is not automatic. Students must complete this approval process each academic year with DSR, preferably by July 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, planning to return.
8. The University considers the following factors in determining whether to approve the presence of an Assistance Animal in housing:
  - Whether the animal's presence would force another individual from individual housing (e.g., serious allergies);
  - Whether the animal's presence would otherwise violate individuals' right to peace and quiet enjoyment of their dwelling;
  - Whether the animal is housebroken and able to live with others in a reasonable manner;
  - Whether the animal's vaccinations are up to date;
  - Whether the animal poses or has posed in the past a direct threat to the individual or others, such as injuring or acting aggressively; and
  - Whether the animal causes or has caused excessive damage to housing beyond reasonable wear and tear
9. Please allow up to one week for processing.

## Owner requirements

The owner of a [Service Animal or Assistance Animal approved to live in University housing](#) must abide by the following conditions:

- A. The owner must comply with state and local laws and regulations pertaining to licensing and vaccination.
- B. The owner must clean up after and properly dispose of the animal's waste in a safe and sanitary manner.
- C. The owner is financially responsible for any property damage caused by the animal beyond reasonable wear and tear.
- D. The animal must be properly housed, restrained, and under the owner's control at all times. If an animal is found loose or unattended outside the owner's private living quarters, the animal is subject to immediate removal from University housing.
- E. The owner may not leave the animal overnight in University housing to be cared for by any individual other than the owner. If the owner is absent from University housing overnight, the animal must accompany the owner, or other arrangements to board the animal outside of University housing must be made. Local animal control authorities will be notified and asked to remove any animal that is left overnight in housing without its owner present. Owners are strongly encouraged to have plans for alternate housing in place for their animal in the event the owner must be absent from University housing overnight, including emergencies or other unexpected events.

### Approval Process for Non-Student and Non-Employee Resident's Animal

#### Service Animal

A non-student or non-employee resident who will utilize a service animal in housing is strongly encouraged but not required to disclose this information in advance to University Housing. This will enable the University to appropriately plan for the animal's presence and answer any questions the resident may have about this policy or its requirements for service animals in housing.

#### Assistance Animal

The approval process for a non-student or non-employee resident to utilize an assistance animal in housing is the same as for students and employees above.

The individual will be required to show proof of residency in University housing to initiate the process.

## Policy Exceptions

Individuals wishing to request a modification or exception to this policy as a reasonable accommodation should contact DSR.

### Dispute Resolution Procedure

Disputes or disagreements about a disability determination, appropriateness of accommodations, service/assistance quality, or an animal restriction should first be raised with the DSR advisor involved. If the matter cannot be resolved, a dispute resolution should be submitted to DSR.

Individuals may also file a written grievance with the University's Deputy ADA Coordinator for Grievances:

Deputy ADA Coordinator for Grievances  
Division of Inclusion and Equity  
4035 James H. Zumberge Hall  
1 Campus Drive  
Allendale, Michigan 49401  
Phone: (616) 331-3296  
Email: inclusion@gvsu.edu

*Grand Valley University reserves the right to make exceptions to, modify, or eliminate this policy and or its content. This document supersedes all previous policies, procedures, or guidelines relative to this subject. DSR is responsible for implementing this policy. Success requires the cooperation of all students, staff, and faculty.*

## References and Resources

1. GVSU Animals on Property Owned or Controlled by the University  
<https://www.gvsu.edu/policies/>
2. GVSU Housing Office Assistance Animal Policy  
<https://www.gvsu.edu/housing/>
3. GVSU Counseling Center  
<https://www.gvsu.edu/counsel/>
4. The Fair Housing of West Michigan  
<http://www.fhcm.org/>