

Psychiatric Service Dog Work and Tasks

<http://www.psychdog.org/tasks.html>

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In this list, anything that is obvious to the average outside observer is considered a physical task. Work includes subtler interactions that an outside observer would not necessarily detect, even when that assistance is being provided right in front of that person. We further subdivide work into three categories. **Cognitive behavioral** work engages the handler's cognitive behavioral therapy techniques, such as evaluating thought patterns in response to a cue from the dog. **Leveraging a dog's natural senses** involves the dog responding (or not responding) to cues in the environment, and the human partner using these responses for the purpose of reality testing. **Mind/body regulatory** work prompts the partner to engage in self-regulation behaviors in response to the dog's action. This form of work generally involves the dog alerting to a change in mood or identity, anxiety, flashbacks, etc. and the handler using the alert to take control of the episode and try to prevent it from becoming full-blown, or to take their PRN medication before they are too involved with the episode to remember they have it.

Please note this list is not absolute. Some items listed as a physical task, e.g. tactile stimulation, may have a work component if the dog is recognizing and responding on their own to the handlers medical condition, or if the handler uses the tactile stimulation as a part of their cognitive behavioral or mind/body regulatory work. Conversely, some items listed as work, e.g. waking the handler, may have a physical task component where the general public might see the dog performing some function, but the handler must respond to the dog's cue in a cognitive behavioral or mind/body regulatory fashion for the symptom to be mitigated. Use this list as a guide for what a service dog might be able to do for someone with a psychiatric disability, but remember each individual will have different needs that might be fulfilled in a variety of ways.

Major Depression:

Symptoms	Assistive Behaviors	Assistance Classification
Apathy	Tactile stimulation	Work (cognitive behavioral) and/or physical task
	Initiate activity (play or walks)	Work (cognitive behavioral) and/or physical task
Hypersomnia	Wake up handler	Physical task and work (cognitive behavioral)
Feelings of isolation	Tactile stimulation	Work (cognitive behavioral) and/or physical task
	Initiate activity outside the home	Work (cognitive behavioral)
Sadness or tearfulness	Deep pressure stimulation	Physical task
	Tactile stimulation	Physical task
	Initiate activity	Work (mind/body) and/or physical task
Insomnia	Stay with and focus on handler	Work (mind/body)
Suicidal ideation	Ground handler	Work (cognitive behavioral or mind/body)
	Deep pressure stimulation	Physical task
Self-mutilation	Interrupt by alerting or tactile stimulation	Work (cognitive behavioral or mind/body)
	Ground handler	Work (cognitive behavioral or mind/body)
Psychomotor retardation	Guide handler using harness or leash	Physical task
Memory loss	Remind to take medication	Physical task
	Find keys or telephone	Physical task
Disorganization	Remind handler to perform daily routines	Work (cognitive behavioral)

Bipolar (manic phase):

Symptoms	Assistive Behaviors	Assistance Classification
Racing thoughts	Tactile stimulation	Work (cognitive behavioral) and/or physical task
Distractibility		
Hyper focus	Alert to incipient manic episode	Work (cognitive behavioral or mind/body)
Irritability		
Hyper locomotion		
Olfactory cue?		
Aggressive driving	Alert to aggressive driving	Work (cognitive behavioral or mind/body)
Insomnia	Remind handler to go to bed	Work (cognitive behavioral)
Memory loss	Remind to take medication	Physical task
	Find keys or telephone	Physical task
Disorganization	Remind handler to perform daily routines	Work (cognitive behavioral)

Panic:

Symptoms	Assistive Behaviors	Assistance Classification
Derealization	Tactile stimulation	Physical task
Depersonalization		
Olfactory cue	Alert to incipient anxiety or panic attack	Work (cognitive behavioral or mind/body)
Increase in heart rate		
Change in breathing pattern		
Fear	Guide handler to a safe place	Physical task
Fight or flight response		
Pounding heart	Tactile or deep pressure stimulation	Physical task
Trembling		
Nausea		
Sweating		
Dizziness	Brace or counterbalance handler	Physical task
Chills	Pressure and warmth stimulation	Physical task
Memory loss	Remind to take medication	Physical task
	Find keys or telephone	Physical task

Anxiety:

Symptoms	Assistive Behaviors	Assistance Classification
Restlessness or distractibility	Tactile stimulation	Physical task
	Alert to rising anxiety	Work (cognitive behavioral or mind/body)
Sleep disturbance	Keep handler in bed	Physical task and/or work (cognitive behavioral)
	Alert to intruders	Work (cognitive behavioral or leveraging natural senses)
Anxiety	Guide handler to a safe place	Physical task
Muscle tension	Initiate activity	Physical task
Memory loss	Remind to take medication	Physical task
	Find keys or telephone	Physical task

Agoraphobia:

Symptoms	Assistive Behaviors	Assistance Classification
Anxiety	Tactile stimulation	Physical task
Fear of leaving home	Initiate activity outside the home	Physical task
Social withdrawal	Initiate interpersonal interaction	Work (cognitive behavioral or leveraging natural senses)

Social Phobia:

Symptoms	Assistive Behaviors	Assistance Classification
Anxiety	Tactile stimulation	Physical task
Social withdrawal	Initiate interpersonal interaction	Work (cognitive behavioral or leveraging natural senses)
Fear	Tactile or deep pressure stimulation	Physical task
Feeling overwhelmed	Guide handler to a safe place	Physical task

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:

Symptoms	Assistive Behaviors	Assistance Classification
Reclusiveness	Initiate activity outside the home	Physical task
Night terrors	Wake up handler	Physical task and work (cognitive behavioral)
	Turn on lights	Physical task
Startle response	Stand between handler and others	Physical task
	Alert to presence of others	Physical task
Memory loss	Remind to take medication	Physical task
	Find keys or telephone	Physical task
Dissociative fugue	Guide handler home or to a safe place	Physical task
Hypervigilance	Search house for intruders	Physical task
Dissociative flashback	Tactile stimulation	Physical task

	Grounding	Work (cognitive behavioral, mind/body, or leveraging natural senses)
Sensory overload	Tactile or deep pressure stimulation	Physical task
Social withdrawal	Initiate interpersonal interaction	Work (cognitive behavioral therapy or leveraging natural senses)
Emotional escalation	Alert to emotional escalation	Work (cognitive behavioral or mind/body)
Hallucination	Hallucination discernment	Work (leveraging natural senses)
Suicidal ideation	Stay with and focus on handler	Work (cognitive behavioral)
	Deep pressure stimulation	Physical task

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder:

Symptoms	Assistive Behaviors	Assistance Classification
Distractibility	Tactile or deep pressure stimulation	Physical task
Intrusive thoughts/images		
Anxiety		
Repetitive/compulsive behavior	Interrupt repetitive behaviors	Work (cognitive behavioral)
Memory loss	Remind to take medication	Physical task
	Find keys or telephone	Physical task

Dissociative Identity Disorder:

Symptoms	Assistive Behaviors	Assistance Classification
Flashbacks or distress	Tactile stimulation	Physical task
	Grounding	Work (cognitive behavioral or leveraging natural senses)
Startle response	Alert to presence of others	Physical task
Olfactory or behavioral cue	Alert to incipient dissociative episode	Work (cognitive behavioral or mind/body)
Dissociation	Tactile stimulation to interrupt	Physical task
	Ground handler	Work (cognitive behavioral, mind/body, or leveraging natural senses)
Self-mutilation	Interrupt by alerting or tactile stimulation	Work (cognitive behavioral)
Hallucination	Hallucination discernment	Work (leveraging natural senses)
Nightmares	Wake up handler	Physical task and work (cognitive behavioral)
Forgotten personal identity	Carry handler identification documents	Physical task
	Give identification documents to others for assistance	Physical task
Anxiety	Tactile or deep pressure stimulation	Physical task
Dissociative fugue	Guide home, to a safe place, or assist in crossing streets	Physical task

Schizophrenia:

Symptoms	Assistive Behaviors	Assistance Classification
Flat affect	Tactile stimulation	Physical task
Hallucination	Hallucination discernment	Work (leveraging natural senses)
Catatonic behavior	Ground handler	Work (cognitive behavioral, mind/body, or leveraging natural senses)
Disorganized speech or behavior		
Psychosis		
Delusions		
Forgotten personal identity	Carry handler identification documents	Physical task
	Give identification documents to others for assistance	Physical task
Disorientation or confusion	Guide handler home or to a safe place	Physical task
Social withdrawal	Initiate interpersonal interaction	Work (cognitive behavioral or leveraging natural senses)
Feeling overwhelmed	Guide handler to a safe place	Physical task
Memory loss	Remind to take medication	Physical task
	Find keys or telephone	Physical task