

U.S. Hogs For Dogs, Inc.

Sample Lesson Plans For Educators

Lesson 3 -- Assistance Dogs 101

Introduction

This lesson plan will help you introduce your students to the world of Assistance Dogs - dogs who have been specially trained to help people with a variety of disabilities.

Assistance Dogs may be described as dogs who help people with the tasks of daily living, helping them to lead more independent lives and to meet every day challenges with more confidence.

Assistance Dogs can perform a variety of tasks for people with disabilities and the names we use to describe those dogs help us understand what they do:

Guide Dogs: Generally refers to dogs that work with someone with a vision disability.

These dogs help people move safely through the community by guiding them to their destinations. They help people avoid obstacles by leading them around them. A person who is blind depends on the dog for his safety, knowing that the dog will not let him run into light poles, for example, or step into holes in the pavement. The dogs also are alert to overhead obstacles and can guide a person around these. These dogs are trained to disobey their owner if they know that an accident could result from following a command. For example, if the owner tells the dog to go “forward” and there is an obstacle ahead (like a moving car), the dog will refuse to go forward until it is safe to do so.

Service Dogs: Dogs that are trained to do many different tasks, depending on the person’s needs. They work with people with mobility challenges – either the individual uses a wheelchair or perhaps is unsteady when walking and falls often. For example, the dog may retrieve items that fall on the floor. It would be unsafe for someone to try and lean out of a wheelchair to pick something up. Or, it may be difficult for someone with a balance issue to bend over to retrieve a dropped item. Dogs may also open and close doors, turn lights on and off, push elevator buttons, doorbells, and automatic doorplates. A dog can walk next to someone and provide him or her with something to touch if they feel unsteady and can also help them get back up if they fall.

Hearing Dogs: These dogs are trained to alert an individual with hearing loss to sounds. For example, a Hearing Dog can tell someone if there is a knock at the door, a smoke detector alarm going off, or a baby crying. Someone who is deaf can feel very vulnerable when they can’t hear these everyday sounds. A Hearing Dog can give them confidence to live and work in an environment where they won’t miss someone at the door, or the alarm clock ringing, or their beeper going off. Hearing Dogs are trained to respond to the sound by going to the person and making contact to get their attention and then leading them to the sound.

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Seizure Dogs: These dogs are trained to help people who experience seizures, either because of a medical condition they were born with or seizures due to an accident. Having a seizure can be a very scary event for an individual and can leave him or her weak and confused. Seizure Dogs can be trained to respond in a variety of ways. They can get a phone so that the person can call for help after the seizure, they can stay by the person and provide comfort or they can learn to get help by pressing an emergency alert button. In some cases, Seizure Dogs learn to predict the seizures before they happen and can give the person time to get into a safe position before the seizure begins. These dogs can help people who experience seizures regain some normalcy to their everyday lives, knowing that their dog will be able to help them through the next seizure. This can allow an individual to participate in activities and employment that may have been impossible before.

Activity 1

[Note: if your students do not have an understanding of individuals with disabilities and the ways in which these disabilities may manifest themselves, please use the lesson plan “Individuals with Disabilities” before doing this activity]

Discussion with Students:

In addition to talking about the ways in which these different kinds of Assistance Dogs help people, there are several other points you may want to cover.

- **Where and How are the Assistance Dogs trained?**

There are many programs around the country that train Assistance Dogs, using a variety of methods. In many of the programs, puppies are placed in homes at around 7-8 weeks of age. People in these homes – puppy raisers – help these puppies get off to a good start in life. They take them with them as often as they can, exposing the puppy to the sights, sounds, and smells of a community. The puppies learn that they can go many places and be comfortable in many kinds of settings. They get used to a life that is active and “out in the world”. These puppy raisers also make sure that the puppies get basic obedience. Puppies learn commands such as “sit”, “down”, “stay” and “come”, which help them work on harder things when they are being trained by professional trainers when they’re older. Puppy raisers also make sure that the puppies learn basic household manners like not jumping on people, not stealing food from kitchen counters and that they potty outside, not inside! When the puppies are old enough (usually between 14 and 18 months old) they are then trained to do all of the tasks that are needed by a person.

- **Why can Assistance Dogs go places where my pet dog can’t?**

When a dog is trained to be an Assistance Dog for someone with a disability, the dog now acts as the eyes, ears, legs or arms for that person. Under the Americans With Disabilities Act, these trained dogs are granted

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access, with their person, to any area that the general public has access to. That means that the Assistance Dogs can go into restaurants and stores, sleep in hotels, and travel on buses, trains, and planes. Since the person with the disability needs this dog for a variety of reasons, the dog is allowed to go wherever the person goes.

- **How should I act when seeing an Assistance Dog in public?**
Assistance Dogs are working dogs. When you see a dog wearing some sort of identification that it is working (a cape, special collar or scarf, or a harness), do not attempt to pet the dog. You could distract it from its job. This would be like covering up someone's eyes while they are driving, putting your hands over their ears when they are trying to listen for something important, or holding onto their arm or leg to prevent them from moving. You wouldn't interfere with someone in these ways and, for the same reason, you don't bother a working dog. Besides touching working dogs, there are other ways to distract them, for example offering them food or talking to them. They are trying very hard to do their jobs and we need to help them by not distracting them.

If you are interested, you may ask the person with the dog questions about their dog. They might want to talk to you about it. It's all right to ask, but realize some people do not want to talk about their dogs or their disability and, even if they want to, they may be busy or just trying to get somewhere and get something done, and may not have the time to talk with you.

After discussing the above information with your students, divide the class up into groups – one group for each kind of Assistance Dog. Using the information provided here and books or other resources (see the Suggested Reading List on the Hogs For Dogs website), have students come up with all the ways their kind of Assistance Dog helps people. Then, ask them to demonstrate these different ways to the class. They could choose from several ideas:

- Develop a role-play, with students taking turns being the person with a disability and other students taking the role of the Assistance Dog. Props can be used to make this more realistic (phones, wheelchairs, alarm clock, etc.)
- Create a series of posters. These could be displayed in your classroom or throughout your building
- Design a book, describing the different kind of Assistance Dogs and using student artwork to illustrate. This book could be kept in your classroom or donated to the school library
- Create a presentation which they could do for other classrooms, helping more students in the school learn about Assistance Dogs

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Activity 2

Children can be wonderful ambassadors for disability awareness if given the “tools” they need. This activity can provide them with one such “tool”.

Goal: Students will share with others in their community their understanding of Assistance Dogs and how they help people with disabilities.

Materials: small stuffed dog, dog brush, blanket, disposable camera, notebook, pen, carrying bag.

Following a discussion of what Assistance Dogs do (see above) students will be ready to take their knowledge into the community with their Traveling Assistance Dog. Students take turns taking the bag with the “Assistance Dog” and its supplies home with them. They can share their knowledge with their family and have the Assistance Dog go to after school and weekend activities with them. Using the notebook, they can keep a journal of their adventures with the dog. Here are some places other children have taken their classroom’s “Assistance Dog”:

- To their after-school programs
- To the barber shop when they got a haircut
- To the dentist’s office where they explained to the dentist what Assistance Dogs do
- To sleepovers with friends
- On vacations
- Out to eat at restaurants (dogs need practice eating out!)

These are just a few suggestions of the places students can take the dog. Using the camera, they can document their activities. (It is helpful to limit children to taking one or two pictures each). Each time the bag returns to the classroom, have children share their journal entries and tell about what they did with the dog.

The journal entries and photos can be made into a classroom book.

Follow-up

Invite someone in the community who is partnered with a Service or Guide Dog to come into your classroom and share their experiences with your students.

Note: U.S. Hogs For Dogs, Inc. provides sample lesson plans as generic outlines for activities and topics of discussion within the classroom. Not all activities or topics may be suitable for all ages. The appropriateness and suitability of these lessons are left to the educator’s professional discretion.