

## **How Do I Get Qualified for An Emotional Support Animal?**

Did you know guinea pigs can be emotional support animals? Yes, they can!

There are a few requirements for emotional support animals. The most important thing is that your guinea pig does not pose a threat to people or housing. Since guinea pigs are generally not destructive or aggressive, you will likely meet this requirement. You will need an Emotional Support Animal (ESA) recommendation letter from an authorized healthcare provider so that your pet guinea pig can become your emotional support animal. While all domesticated guinea pigs can qualify as ESAs, not all owners can.

To get an ESA letter, you must consult healthcare professionals who are authorized to prescribe emotional support animal letters in your area. However, any licensed mental health professional, such as a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist can write an ESA letter.

Remember, if you get an ESA letter from a non-licensed doctor, it will not be accepted by housing facilities and airlines. So, before scheduling an appointment with a mental health professional, make sure they are licensed to write emotional support animal letters (My ESA Doctor, 2019).

Here is a list of people who can prescribe an ESA Letter:

- A Primary Care Physician
- A Licensed Therapist
- Any Licensed Mental Health Professional
- A Licensed General Physician

A primary care physician can provide an emotional support letter provided they are licensed and authorized to do so. If your family doctor is taking care of your mental health conditions, they can write an ESA letter for you. Therefore, those who are comfortable talking to their family doctors have no need to talk to an unfamiliar doctor to get emotional support animal letters.

Keep in mind that therapy animals do not have the same rights as service animals and emotional support animals. Therapy Animals are allowed access to public locations by courtesy. Therapy animals cannot travel in the cabin of an airline for free and are not exempt from pet restricted housing.

### **❖ Here are some tips to talk to an ESA doctor:**

#### **➤ Educate Yourself**

- Before you see an authorized ESA healthcare provider, do in-depth research related to emotional support animals, how does the pet therapy work, and ESA laws. Spend extra time to read online articles and YouTube videos and evaluate how an emotional support animal can help with conditions.

➤ Collect Your Medical Reports

- When you talk to the healthcare provider for an ESA letter, they will evaluate your condition. They may ask you to share medical history and reports for verification purposes. So, make sure you bring the necessary reports along with it.

➤ Is Your Condition Listed in ESA Qualifying Conditions

- To get an emotional support animal letter, you must be diagnosed by at least one of the ESA qualifying conditions. Typically, certain experiences and events in life can result in a decline in an individual's mental or emotional stability, which in turn affects their everyday life. These mental disabilities include, but are not restricted to:
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Panic attacks
  - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - Personality Disorder
- Listed below are some of the examples of various symptoms related to different emotional/mental disabilities:
  - Having trouble maintaining relationships with people.
  - Feeling continuously anxious or depressed for a couple of days or more.
  - Developing paranoia and other irrational fears linked with otherwise normal life situations or problems.
  - Difficulty or inability in interacting with others in public or private settings (TherapyPet.org, 2019).

➤ Have Open Discussion

- During your consultation with the healthcare provider, be upfront and honest, and have an open discussion related to your condition. Tell how your four-legged friend has helped you in managing your symptoms, and state all the reasons why you need the animal-assisted therapy.

➤ Elements That an ESA Letter Should Contain

- A legitimate emotional support animal letter should clearly state that you are suffering from a mental illness that can be managed with the help of pet therapy. It should be on the therapist's letterhead, and should contain the following elements:
  - Therapist's name and signature
  - Date of issuance

- Therapist's license number, date of the license, and state where it's issued
- Your name and pet details (optional)

➤ Register your emotional support animal and receive all the benefits.

- After obtaining your Emotional Support Animal (ESA) recommendation letter from a licensed healthcare provider, register your furry companion on this website:  
<https://usserviceanimals.org/register/emotional-support-animal>

In order to receive federal legal protection for you and your ESA, Federal Law requires that you present your prescription letter for an emotional support animal to your landlord or airline (US Service Animals, 2020). If you live in a housing that has a no pets policy, your ESA letter can help. When you have a valid emotional support animal letter, you can live with your guinea pig even in pet-free housing. You will not have to pay additional pet deposits or pet fees (ESA Doctors, 2018).

When you have a valid ESA letter for your guinea pig, you may be able to travel with your guinea pig on a plane. An emotional support animal may travel in the cabin of an airplane with you as long as it doesn't pose a threat to people or create a nuisance. No special training is required, just basic good behavior and a pet carrier. Please note that some airlines will not accept rodents as emotional support animals. This specific restriction is addressed directly by the Air Carrier Access Act so, until further notice, we recommend traveling with an airline that has a friendly policy towards your ESA. If you are uncertain, you would want to check with the airline in advance to avoid any confusion or inconvenience. Some airlines only allow guinea pigs in the cargo or luggage areas. You should know that these animals are sensitive to noise and temperature changes so this may not be the safest option.

You should understand that your emotional support animal is there to help with your symptoms, but it is helpful to see a healthcare provider to continue working on your treatment. In other words, your emotional support guinea pig is not a cure for an illness, but it can be a part of your wellness process.

## References

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