

# Documentation Guidelines for Emotional Support Animals

To initiate a request for an Emotional Support Animal (ESA) as a reasonable accommodation in University managed housing, students must complete and return to the Disability Services Program (DSP) the [Request for Accommodation form](#) and provide supporting documentation.

We offer the following guidelines to assist students and their healthcare or mental healthcare providers in preparing the necessary and appropriate supporting documentation for the University. The DSP staff use information from the Request for Accommodation along with supporting documentation to validate the existence of a disability and to understand how the prescription of an ESA may impact a student and their disability, in order to make an informed decision about the requests.

The University of Denver engages in an interactive process with students requesting an ESA in their University housing to determine whether the request is reasonable and does not pose an undue hardship on the University or present a danger to members of the community or their property. This is consistent with the Universities obligations under the Fair Housing Act (FHA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) describes an assistance animal, which includes an ESA, as “an animal that works, provides assistance, or 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”.

[https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/fair\\_housing\\_equal\\_opp/assistance\\_animals#\\_What\\_Is\\_an](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/assistance_animals#_What_Is_an) The ADA defines a service animal as a dog or in some cases a miniature horse that is individually trained to perform a service or task associated with a person’s disability. *Please note that an ESA is **not** a service animal.*

In support of an ESA request, a student must provide documentation sufficient to establish (1) that the provider is a reliable third party with knowledge of the circumstances of the specific student; (2) the student has a documented disability and (3) a nexus between the student’s disability and the need for an ESA. Supporting documentation may only be provided by a licensed healthcare or mental healthcare professional and be dated within 6 months of taking occupancy of University managed housing.

## 1. Reliable Third Party

In order for the provider to establish themselves as a reliable third party, documentation should be provided on official letterhead, including their name, title, professional credentials, address, phone number, signature, and date of the report.

As additional support to establish that they are appropriately informed of the circumstances of the specific student, providers often include information such as the nature and duration of the therapeutic relationship with the student, number of visits, and the diagnostic methodology used.

## 2. Demonstration of Disability

Submitted documentation should include sufficient evidence to establish a disability, not merely a diagnosis. Under the FHA, Section 504 and the ADA a disability means a functional limitation of one or more major life activities and that the limitation experienced is beyond that which the average person could expect to experience.

## 3. Nexus

Submitted documentation must also demonstrate that the animal has been individually prescribed to the student, show a nexus between the disability and the assistance or support the animal provides the student including demonstration that the ESA will alleviate one or more symptoms of an existing disability. Providers should also include any additional rationale or clarification the University may need to understand their professional opinion.