

# EXPOSURE & SOCIALIZATION CHECKLIST FOR NEW SERVICE DOG HANDLERS

**Goal:** Your dog should be able to stay focused on you and their job no matter what is happening around them. Exposures should be calm, positive, or at least neutral. Never push a fearful dog — back up, make it easier, and try again later with treats and praise.

**Special Note on Fire Department Training** Call your local fire department today — **every single one I've ever worked with has been thrilled to help**. Tell them you're raising or training a service dog and ask if you can bring your pup for desensitization to sirens, flashing lights, stretchers, uniforms, oxygen tanks, and simulated medical emergencies. They love doing this. It's one of the best real-world medical-emergency exposures you can give your dog, and it's completely free.

## PEOPLE

- Men, women, children, toddlers, babies, elderly
- People of all ethnicities, sizes, heights
- Beards, hats, sunglasses, hoods, masks, costumes
- People in uniforms (police, mail carriers, delivery, medical scrubs)
- Wheelchairs, walkers, canes, crutches, scooters
- People pushing strollers, shopping carts, or carrying large packages
- People running, biking, skateboarding, yelling, laughing, clapping

## SOUNDS

- Sirens (police, ambulance, fire) — **Fire Dept is best for this**
- Loud music, cheering, applause, screaming kids
- Vacuum, hair dryer, blender, dishwasher, coffee grinder
- Thunder, fireworks, construction noise, lawn mower
- Dropping pans, garage door, barking dogs, overhead announcements
- Car horns, air brakes, public transit announcements

## SURFACES & TEXTURES

- Grass (short, tall, wet), dirt, gravel, sand, mud
- Concrete, asphalt, tile, hardwood, carpet
- Metal grates, manhole covers, slippery floors, ice/snow

- Stairs (open and closed riser), escalators, elevators
- Wet pavement, puddles, bridges, docks

#### PLACES & ENVIRONMENTS

- Grocery stores, big-box stores, malls, restaurants
- Crowded sidewalks, busy parking lots, outdoor markets
- Elevators, revolving doors, automatic doors
- Public transit (bus, train, subway — if accessible)
- Doctor's offices, hospitals, vet clinics
- Airports, hotels, schools, libraries, churches
- Parks with kids and dogs, beaches, hiking trails

#### ANIMALS & DISTRACTIONS

- Friendly dogs (calm and excitable), puppies
- Cats, birds, squirrels, livestock (at safe distance)
- People eating, food on the floor, dropped treats

#### HANDLING & GROOMING

- Touching ears, mouth, paws, tail, belly
- Nail trimming, brushing, wiping feet, putting on harness/vest
- Being picked up, hugged, examined like at the vet
- Wearing booties, muzzle (if needed), coat

#### MEDICAL & EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

- Fire department visit (sirens, lights, stretchers, EMT uniforms)
- Simulated medical emergencies (someone pretending to fall, using a walker, oxygen mask)
- Wheelchair transfers, crutches, canes in motion
- Crowds with sudden movements or loud talking

#### PRO TIPS FROM SOMEONE WHO LIVES THIS

- Start small and short — 5–10 minutes is plenty at first.
- Always bring high-value treats and end on a win.
- Track how your dog reacts (calm, curious, stressed) so you know what needs more work.

- Do these exposures **before** formal task training so your dog learns the world is safe while they focus on you.
- For allergy-alert or medical-alert dogs, extra medical/emergency exposures are critical.

Print this, keep it in your training binder, and check things off as you go. You've got this. Your dog is going to be the calm, steady hero you both need.

**Strength stands watch**

**And so do I.**

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