

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax

Animals on Campus

Subject: Animals on Campus

Number: VIII.A.

Effective Date: September 18, 2019

Approved By: Coordinating Team

Policy

This policy provides the rules concerning individuals bringing animals on Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax (UUCF) property.

All individuals are generally prohibited from bringing animals on the UUCF campus and into any buildings on the UUCF property. However, individuals with disabilities are allowed to bring service animals as provided below. Emotional support animals (ESAs) and pets are permitted on a case-by-case basis with prior approval according to the policies below.

Definition of Service Animals

In concert with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax (UUCF) defines service animals as “dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Examples of such work or tasks include guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack or performing other duties. Service animals are working animals, not pets. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person’s disability. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA and Virginia law.”

A service animal will be identified by their uniform and will be allowed in the Sanctuary Building, Administration Building and/or classrooms with their handler. When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, UUCF staff or leaders may ask two questions of the handler: 1) Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability, and (2) What work or task has the dog been trained to perform.

UUCF expects service animals and their handlers to meet the following expectations:

- Service animals remain with their handlers while on campus.
- Service animals do not sit on UUCF furniture.
- Service animals must be harnessed, leashed or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the service animal’s work or the individual’s disability prevents using these devices. In that case, the individual must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal or other effective controls.
- Service animals do not whine, bark, grumble, growl or make other noises. An exception may be if the whining is an alert, such as to notify a handler who is experiencing an anxiety attack or a drop in blood sugar.
- Service animals do not obstruct an area used for emergency evacuation.

The Coordinating Team may make exceptions to this policy to accommodate unique events and situations.

Emotional Support Animal (ESA) Policy

UUCF defines emotional support animals (ESA) as animals (typically a dog or cat) that provide a therapeutic benefit to their owners through companionship and are not specifically trained or certified to perform tasks for a person who suffers from emotional, psychiatric or mental health-related disabilities. Under the law, an ESA does not qualify as a service animal and, thus, is not granted legal access to places of public accommodation by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Therefore, requests made by persons who wish to access the UUCF campus with their ESAs are treated as a unique situation, which may be considered as an exception to the service animal policy.

If you are the owner of an ESA (or the caretaker of an owner) and the ESA alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a mental health-related disability, you may call or email the administrative coordinator to request an in-person appointment with a member of the ministerial staff to discuss approval of an exception to the service animal policy. Approval is strictly on a case-by-case basis.

ESA owners should have current documentation from a licensed mental health professional or physician treating their mental health-related disability stating that the person has a mental health-related disability, the animal accompanying the customer is necessary to the customer's mental health or treatment, the number and type(s) of animal(s), the individual providing the assessment of the customer is a licensed mental health professional or physician and the person is under their professional care, the mental health professional's license number (or type, issue date, and state in which the license was issued).

Unless the senior minister grants approval, an ESA is not permitted access to the campus for Sunday services or other classes, events and programs. Therefore, requests for appointments should be made well in advance of a plan to attend. Persons with ESAs who are granted reasonable accommodation by a minister will receive a special tag and must display this tag in order for staff, ushers and other community members to readily identify their ESA as approved to be inside UUCF facilities.

Approved ESAs must comply with all the expectations listed under the service animal policy. In addition, ESAs are not permitted in the Partner Church lounge and are encouraged to find seating toward the back Sanctuary and away from ADA-approved service animals. Should an ESA not comply with these expectations, the owner will be asked to remove their ESA from the campus immediately, and approval of the ESA may be revoked.

As a faith community, we agree to live by UUCF's Covenant of Right Relations, which means circumventing this procedure or policy or attempting to characterize an ESA as an ADA service animal would not be in line with the Covenant.

Pets

Family pets are not allowed on campus, unless pre-approval from the operations manager or the senior minister has been given, the pet displays a UUCF animal tag, and the owner agrees to comply with the expectations listed under the service animal policy.

Ref: <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/virginia-laws-on-service-dogs-and-emotional-support-animals.html>