



Practice Alert

New Travel Guidelines for Emotional Support Animals

June 2021

As of January 2021, emotional support animals (ESAs) are no longer recognized as service animals and are prohibited from flying with their owners under the United States Department of Transportation's Air Carrier Access Act,

<https://www.transportation.gov/airconsumer/passengers-disabilities>. Clinical social workers should be aware of the changes especially when receiving requests to provide supportive documentation to patients wishing to travel with their emotional support animal.

Amendments to the Act were issued in a final ruling in December 2020 and serve to ensure the safety of passengers and airline staff. According to the rule, ESAs are considered pets who are subjected to airline pet policies. To date, United, Delta, JetBlue, Spirit, Alaska, and American Airlines are no longer allowing ESAs. This change, however, does not apply to psychiatric service animals who are still under the same protections as other service animals. The Air Carrier Access Act defines service animal as a dog who is trained to perform a task to benefit a qualified individual with a disability. Such disability may be physical, psychiatric, sensory, and/or intellectual.

Under the Final Rule, airlines may require passengers with service animals to complete specific forms developed by the Department of Transportation (e.g. the Animal Air Transportation Form and Animal Relief Attestation Form). The required forms can be found at

<https://www.transportation.gov/individuals/aviation-consumer-protection/us-department-transportation-service-animal-air-0> and

[https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2020-](https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2020-12/Service%20Animal%20Relief%20Form.pdf)

[12/Service%20Animal%20Relief%20Form.pdf](https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2020-12/Service%20Animal%20Relief%20Form.pdf). Animal forms must also be accessible on airlines' websites that require them for travel.

For more information on service animal and pet policies, contact the individual airlines. Additional information on the Final Rule can be obtained by contacting the United States Department of Transportation at 202-336-4000 or by visiting their website at <https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2020-12/Service%20Animal%20Final%20Rule.pdf>

NASW provides additional information on ESAs in the Practice Perspectives, *The Role of Animals as Therapeutic Aids in Private Practice*, available at <https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=MzB8oKdNVlw%3d&portalid=0>

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