

◆ Your ESD Journey Checklist

Getting Your Emotional Support Dog Letter – Step by Step

A warm, practical guide to navigating your Emotional Support Dog certification – reduce overwhelm, stay organised, and move forward with confidence.

This checklist walks you through every stage of obtaining your ESA letter – from your first honest conversation with yourself, all the way to keeping your documentation current. Print it, tick each box, and remember: you deserve support.

01 Assess Your Mental Health Needs

Reflect honestly on how your daily life is affected by your emotional or mental health condition.

Think about sleep, work, relationships, and daily routines.

Identify the specific ways a dog's companionship helps reduce your symptoms.

Note any diagnosed conditions (anxiety, depression, PTSD, etc.) that may qualify.

Write down two or three concrete examples of your dog's positive impact on your wellbeing.

These examples will be helpful when speaking to your mental health professional.

Note *There are no right or wrong answers here – this step is about clarity, not judgement.*

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02 Consult a Licensed Mental Health Professional

Research and choose a licensed therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist.

Ensure they are licensed in your state and authorised to write ESA letters.

Schedule your appointment – telehealth options are widely available and convenient.

Share your mental health history openly and honestly during the consultation.

Discuss your dog's role in your emotional support – be specific and genuine.

Ask the professional about their experience writing ESA letters.

Confirm that the letter will be on official letterhead with their licence number.

Avoid any service that offers instant letters without a real clinical evaluation.

Note *A legitimate letter always comes from a real, ongoing therapeutic relationship – not a quick online form.*

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03 Obtain and Store Your ESA Letter Securely

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Review the letter carefully – check for your name, diagnosis reference, and the professional’s licence number.

Confirm the letter is dated and includes the professional’s contact information.

Make 2–3 physical copies and store them in a safe, accessible place.

Save a digital copy (PDF) in a secure cloud folder (Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.).

Email yourself a copy as an additional backup.

Share a copy with a trusted person (partner, family member) in case of emergencies.

Note *Treat this letter like a passport – losing it creates unnecessary delays when you need it most.*

04 Renew Your Letter as Needed

Note the date your letter was issued – most ESA letters are valid for 12 months.

Set a calendar reminder 4–6 weeks before expiry to schedule your renewal appointment.

Maintain regular check-ins with your mental health professional throughout the year.

Update your letter if your living situation or mental health needs change.

Request a new letter promptly if your landlord or airline requests a current version.

Note *Renewing proactively means you’re never caught without documentation when you need it.*

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Skipping documentation	Always retain physical and digital copies – verbal confirmation is never enough.
Using non-licensed online services	Your letter must come from a licensed professional who has actually evaluated you.
Forgetting to renew	An expired letter may be rejected by landlords or airlines. Renew before it lapses.
Not being specific with your professional	The more clearly you describe how your dog helps, the stronger your letter will be.

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“Seeking support is not a weakness – it is one of the bravest, most loving things you can do for yourself and your dog.”

– Dr. Shruti Bhattacharya

For the full guide, visit thehappypuppers.com and search How to Get Emotional Support Dog Certification.