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Emotional Support Animals

An **Emotional Support Animal (ESA)** is a pet that provides comfort and emotional stability to a person with a mental or emotional disability. Unlike service animals, ESAs are not trained to perform specific tasks, but their presence alone offers therapeutic benefits to their owners.

Key Elements That Make an Animal an ESA:

1. Emotional or Psychological Support Role

- The animal helps relieve symptoms of mental or emotional conditions such as:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - PTSD
 - Panic Disorders
 - Social Phobia

2. Licensed Mental Health Professional (LMHP) Recommendation

- To be officially recognized as an ESA, the owner must receive a **letter from a licensed therapist, psychiatrist, psychologist, or other qualified mental health professional** stating:
 - The individual has a mental or emotional disability recognized in the DSM-5
 - The presence of the animal is necessary for the individual's mental health and well-being

3. No Special Training Required

- ESAs **do not need to be trained** to perform tasks (unlike service animals).
- They should, however, be well-behaved and not pose a risk or nuisance in housing settings.

4. Applies to All Types of Animals

- Although dogs and cats are most common, ESAs can be any domesticated animal that offers comfort—rabbits, birds, even miniature horses in some cases.

Legal Protections (U.S.)

- **Housing (Fair Housing Act):** Landlords must provide reasonable accommodations for tenants with an ESA, even in no-pets properties.
- **Air Travel:** As of 2021, airlines are no longer required to accommodate ESAs under the **Air Carrier Access Act**, but policies vary by airline.

Important Notes:

- **Service animals are not the same as ESAs**—only service animals (typically dogs) are allowed full public access rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- **An ESA letter must be current** (usually within the last 12 months) and from a qualified provider licensed in the person's state.