

Atlas Assistance Dogs®
Atlas Trainer Academy Course Syllabi
Psychiatric and Cognitive Specialty

Last updated October 14, 2023

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Service Dog Foundations Summary

We have included key sections and summary material from our Service Dog Foundation Course as its own module along with this course. This is in addition to what is included in the syllabus below to ensure necessary pre-requisite information is available.

S4D – Disability Skills Training – Psychiatric & Cognitive

Course Description

This course is text and video based. It covers detailed information regarding a variety of tasks which are used to mitigate disabilities or symptoms related to various psychiatric and cognitive conditions.

The course is accompanied by our **Specialized Psychiatric & Cognitive Disability Skills Manual** which provides details on how to introduce and refine each skill as well as tips, tricks, and important notes. **Please download this manual. The manual will stand on its own as a helpful reference and is intended to be read in parallel as you go through the course.**

We present each skill with a definition, purpose, and prerequisite as well as applications and possible uses with clients. It is then followed by a video demonstration of how to use and/or teach the skill.

Please note:

The words “trainer,” “handler,” and “client” are generally used interchangeably. This is the person who is giving the dog the cue. There are cases where the handler is someone other than the client, and when that is relevant it is called out.

Course Objectives

- Cover the common range of skills that dogs are taught to mitigate different psychiatric and cognitive disabilities
- Teach trainers how to train assistance dogs for common psychiatric and cognitive disability tasks
- Teach trainers how to help clients train their assistance dogs for common psychiatric and cognitive disability tasks

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

- Have a solid understanding of many of psychiatric and cognitive tasks and their use for various conditions
- Know how to train skills typical of psychiatric and cognitive disability tasks, including: General Psychiatric Skills (wake from nightmare, pay attention, graceful exit, circle, block); Grounding Behaviors (anchor, lean, cover/deep pressure therapy, feet, hug, cuddle), and Interruption Behaviors (interrupt repetitive behavior, turtle, kiss).

Outline

- Considerations and clarifications
 - Understanding alerts and responses
 - Repetitive and non-suicidal self-harm behavior
- General Skills
- Grounding behaviors
- Interruption Behaviors

Course Expectations

Please allow multiple sessions of a couple of hours at a time to go through the course and follow along with the accompanying manual. There are many details in the course materials and the manual, so please take time to digest them. If the topic is less familiar to you, you may need more time to research the area in further depth.

You will be asked to complete a very brief survey after you complete the course to give us your feedback.

This course includes two video/written assignments. In each, the videos should show you working with a client to teach them two of the behaviors covered in this course, so as you are going through the course be thinking about which skills you might want to teach.

For the first assignment you may choose from: Graceful Exit, Anchor, Lean, Cover, Feet, Hug, Cuddle

For the second you may choose from: Wake from Nightmare, Pay Attention, Circle, Block, Turtle

Along with the videos, a detailed training plan is required. The training plans should cover the refining stages for each behavior. The videos should be approximately two to four minutes in length. It will likely take you one or more sessions with a client to achieve the desired results in the video. More detailed guidelines for the assignment can be found at the end of this course.

Assessments exist throughout the course for you to test your understanding. They are a mix of multiple choice, fill in the blanks, true false, and long answer questions. A grade of 80% or above is required to pass the test. Students have the opportunity to discuss their answers with Atlas faculty as well as retake tests as needed.