



## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMAL LETTER REQUEST EVALUATION INFORMATION

### What are Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)?

Emotional support animals (ESAs) are animals that provide emotional support and comfort for individuals with disabilities, thus enabling those individuals to function in daily activities. They are not service animals (animals that are trained to perform certain tasks to help individuals with disabilities engage in activities of daily living).

### Under the Law, Where Can My ESA Accompany Me?

Unlike service animals, there are only two situations in which federal law requires others to allow you to have your ESA with you-air travel and housing. However, certain legal requirements must be met, including having appropriate documentation signed by a licensed mental health professional.

### What is an ESA letter evaluation?

When a client requests an ESA letter, the mental health professional has to determine the following:

1. The client meets the diagnostic criteria for one or more mental disorders;
2. Those disorders constitute a *disability*, meaning that the client's symptoms interfere significantly with his or her ability to function in important social and occupational activities;
3. The client *requires* (rather than wants or prefers) the ESA's presence in order to function during flight (or for activities at the client's destination) or in a housing environment;
4. Clinically ethically speaking, it is in the best interest of the client to have the ESA accompany him/her; and
5. The client is under the care of the evaluator or another mental health professional who is collaborating with the evaluator.

In order to determine whether the above conditions are met, the evaluator must collect information from multiple data sources rather than just rely on the client's self-report. These sources may include:

1. A clinical interview with the client, which may take 2-4 hours;
2. Administration of psychological tests, which may take approximately 2 hours;
3. A review of records (e.g., medical records, school records, public records, work-related records, etc.) that may have relevant information; and
4. Collateral interviews (interviews with other people, such as family members, partners, employers, therapists/counselors, teachers, etc. who may have helpful information about the client's difficulties with functioning).

### Cost of ESA Evaluation

The cost of the evaluation is **\$450**, which includes the clinical interview, administration and interpretation of psychological tests, collateral interviews, review of relevant records, and writing a letter documenting the need for the ESA (if deemed appropriate). It is important to note that there is



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no refund if the evaluator concludes that the legal, clinical, and ethical requirements for writing an ESA letter have not been met. Also, it is important to note ESA letters for airlines automatically expire after one year.

**Can't I Just Use an ESA Letter Service Online?**

There are many documented legal, ethical, and clinical problems associated with using an online service. If you use such a service, you are accepting a greater risk that if your letter is challenged, the legal conditions necessary to support the letter may not be in place.

For more detailed information, I recommend reading my article entitled "Regulations Related to Responding to Client Requests for Emotional Support Animal Letters-4 Facts," which was published in *The Advocate Magazine*, the official magazine of the American Mental Health Counselors Association, in the Fall of 2018. Although written for counselors, the article gives much more detailed information on the ESA letter requirements and process, as well as concerns about some of the online ESA letter services. The article can be downloaded using this link: <https://app.box.com/v/ESAletterAdvocate>.

**Consent and Understanding**

If you will be going forward with an ESA letter evaluation at Integrity Counseling, please read the following statement and then sign to indicate your understanding of the above information. If you would first like to ask additional questions, please call (727) 531-7988 or email me at [aaron@integritycounseling.net](mailto:aaron@integritycounseling.net).

Statement of Agreement:

I have reviewed the above information and attest that I understand the above information and am making an informed choice to go forward with the evaluation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client Name (Printed)