

How to Improve Your Emotional Support Animal Process

Campuses are seeing a rise in accommodation requests for Emotional Support Animals (ESAs). Also called assistance, companion, or comfort animals, ESAs are animals that provide their caretakers with comfort and relief from the impacts of mental health disabilities by virtue of the animal's nature and presence.

Institutions are committed to facilitating access to students with disabilities, but ESA accommodations can be complex. This infographic identifies some common challenges and effective tactics to improve your campus process.

1

Set ESA Application Standards

Challenge: ESA accommodation requests are supported by "fee-for-form" verification letters purchased from online providers.

TACTIC

Require that the student's mental health provider **complete a form** to verify the need for an ESA accommodation. Consider also requiring that the provider be located in the institution's or student's home state.

Challenge: Confirmation of the student's disability-related need for an ESA comes from a provider without a mental health background (e.g., dentist).

TACTIC

Require verification from a licensed practitioner or provider with **specialization in mental health**, such as a psychologist, therapist, social worker, psychiatric nurse practitioner, or mental health support group leader.

2

Review Accommodation Application

Challenge: Campus stakeholders question or contest ESA accommodation decisions.

TACTIC

A **committee signs off** on ESA and other housing accommodation decisions. This approach supports a consistent ESA strategy, identifies challenges early on, and establishes accountability.

Challenge: Doubts exist about the appropriateness of the ESA accommodation for the student's stated needs.

TACTIC

Issue a decision of **"need more information."** Explain why the documentation is insufficient and what the student needs to do next. This can include getting more information from their verifying mental health provider or scheduling an appointment with the application evaluator. Institutions do this when they suspect the ESA verification was purchased online or when they want to explore an alternate accommodation.

3

Prepare to Transition to Campus

Challenge: The accommodated student fails to notify their room, suite, or floormates in time for the housing department to address conflicts or concerns.

TACTIC

Housing staff notifies impacted parties about the presence of the animal once the accommodated student receives approval. The notification states that an ESA will be present due to a disability-related need, clarifies the space the animal can occupy, and assures the impacted party that they are not responsible for the animal's care. No personal medical information about the student or their disability is shared.

Challenge: Even though the student signs a contract outlining their ESA responsibilities, they do little to prepare for the complicated transition from home to campus.

TACTIC

Schedule a **transition meeting**, in-person or virtual, between the student and a campus representative from housing or disability services to review responsibilities and prepare the student for caring for themselves and their ESA. Alternatively, give the student an ESA preparedness worksheet to help them think through how to successfully manage ESA responsibilities, such as going to the vet or building animal care into their class schedule.

4

Manage ESAs on Campus

Challenge: The accommodated student encounters early challenges as they adjust to campus life with their ESA.

TACTIC

Schedule an **in-residence check-in** with the student one or two weeks after the start of the semester. Assess and support their management of this transition, address any challenges or conflicts, and reinforce their responsibilities.

Challenge: The accommodated student is hospitalized or unexpectedly unable to care for their ESA.

TACTIC

Require contact information for an **emergency caregiver** who can get the animal within 24 hours of the emergency event. Require this information prior to the student moving on campus and file it with housing and the residence hall.