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Emotional Support Animal (ESA) Policy

This policy explains how Emotional Support Animal (ESA) evaluations and documentation are handled by this practice, in accordance with Virginia law and professional ethical standards.

What Is an Emotional Support Animal?

An Emotional Support Animal (ESA) is a companion animal that provides emotional or psychological support to an individual with a qualifying mental health condition. ESAs do **not** require specialized training and are **not** service animals.

ESA Evaluation Requirements

ESA letters are provided only after a legitimate clinical evaluation and establishment of a therapeutic relationship, as required under Virginia law.

During an ESA evaluation, we assess:

- Mental health history and current symptoms
- Functional impact of symptoms on daily life
- The role the animal plays in emotional regulation or support
- Whether an ESA is clinically appropriate as part of care

Completion of an evaluation does **not** guarantee ESA documentation.

Fees for ESA Evaluations & Documentation

Emotional Support Animal evaluations are billed as a clinical service.

- The **ESA evaluation** is charged at our **standard initial intake fee**, which is determined by your insurance coverage or self-pay agreement.
 - If ESA documentation is clinically appropriate following the evaluation, a **documentation fee of \$50** will apply.
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When ESA Letters Are Issued

ESA documentation may be provided **only** when:

- A qualifying mental health condition is identified
- The animal provides clear therapeutic benefit related to that condition
- Issuance complies with legal and ethical standards

ESA letters are written for a specific purpose (typically housing accommodation) and are not open-ended or permanent.

Important Legal Limitations

Please be aware of the following:

Housing

- ESAs may qualify for housing accommodation under the Fair Housing Act
- Housing providers may request documentation
- ESAs must be well-behaved and not pose a safety risk
- Approval is determined by the housing provider, not the clinician

Public Access

- ESAs are **not** service animals
- ESAs do not have public access rights
- ESA letters do not apply to stores, restaurants, workplaces, or schools

Air Travel

- Airlines are not required to accommodate ESAs
- Most airlines treat ESAs as pets under standard pet policies

Misrepresenting an ESA as a service animal is illegal in Virginia.

What ESA Letters Are Not



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ESA letters are:

- Not registrations or certifications
- Not guaranteed
- Not valid for public access
- Not a substitute for mental health treatment
- Not intended for use outside their stated purpose

Ethical & Legal Compliance

This practice follows all applicable Virginia laws and professional guidelines regarding ESA evaluations. We do not provide letters:

- Without a clinical evaluation
- For non-therapeutic purposes
- To bypass housing, travel, or pet policies improperly

Providing false or misleading ESA documentation is prohibited by Virginia law.

Questions About ESA Services?

We are happy to discuss whether an ESA evaluation may be appropriate for you and explain the process in more detail before scheduling.