

Thank you for your interest in the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue K9 team!

We have compiled information here for our most common questions. Please let us know if there is anything else we can answer for you.

Do I need a dog to work with the K9 team?

No! Some of our K9 team members never plan on handling a dog. Others start without one and select a dog later on. We have 2 different field support roles that we encourage you to participate in - Hiders, and Flankers.

Hiders are the people hidden out in the field that the dog is searching for. They might do anything from a quick runaway for a puppy or new dog, to hiding in a 120 acre problem for an experienced dog.

Flankers are trained to work alongside a Handler and K9 on a mission. Our Flankers are vital, and help navigate, keep an eye on the K9s behavior, communicate with incident command, and assist the handler in many other ways. We require all potential K9 Handlers to become Flankers, so this is a good first step if you're interested.

What if I am not currently on the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office SAR team?

We are happy to have you observe with us from time to time without a dog, and to participate as a non-SAR Hider. All you need to do for this is let us know, and sign a waiver.

Unfortunately we cannot train any dogs that are not on our SAR team. We encourage you to review all of our requirements, and based on that determine if you feel that you and your dog might be a good fit. If so, get your CGC, work on building any skills that we note are important for a SAR dog, and apply for next year's academy. Applications typically run from November through February of each year.

What if I might want to work a dog later, but don't have one now?

This is an ideal way to start with the K9 team! Join us in a Hider / Flanker role, train with us for 6-12 months, and we can then help guide you to choose a potential K9. In the meantime you will learn valuable and vital skills on training procedures, commitments required, reward systems, etc. and you will be able to work with a variety of breeds to see which might click with you.

What if I have a dog now, and think they might be a good fit for SAR?

The ideal new SAR dog is:

- 2 years of age or younger. Certification can take up to 2 years, and with the training required, it really makes the most sense to start with a young dog, so you have a long working career ahead of you.
- Confident in different environments, walking on different surfaces, around different stimuli, etc.
- Biddable & desires to interact with the handler, but also independent enough to work away from the handler when needed to complete the job, and problem solve without handler input.
- Healthy and fit.
- Friendly / neutral to humans and other dogs.
- Has excellent focus, work ethic, and drive.
- Extremely food / toy motivated.

Once you have been selected for our SAR team and go through the Academy, we ask that you attend a few trainings with us first, and work on becoming a Flanker. We can then do a team assessment of your dog to see if he might have the right temperament.

We require all K9s to attain their CGC certificate (Canine Good Citizen), so these are good skills to work on now. You can take a class with your dog, or you can work on the items on your own. When you feel ready to take a test, let us know if you have problems finding evaluators - we have a list of evaluators who will test for about \$25. Please see the attached CGC test item list for more information.

How do I determine if my dog has “excellent work ethic, focus, and drive”?

When we're looking at if a dog is appropriate for SAR, there are many traits that are easier to define - like confidence, curiosity, intelligence, and the ability to problem solve. But one of the more important traits is drive, and that is a lot harder to define. A dog might have all of the other qualities we look for but lack drive, and that alone would likely mean that the dog wouldn't work out long term. It's a work ethic of sorts. It is different from energy (although many people equate the two) - it is a focused energy and perseverance toward a specific task.

Here are two articles that share ways to test dogs for appropriate SAR temperaments. Some are pretty much the CGC elements, but they do talk about ways to test drive and focus. They are both fairly puppy-focused, but much still applies to what we might look for in a K9 candidate.

<http://www.eshepherd.org/temperament-testing-search/>

<https://puppyintraining.com/search-and-rescue-dogs/>

This video is from a detection dog agency. Detection dogs need 'next level' drive and work ethic, but it still shows how they assess drive in dogs, and demonstrates good examples of what high drive looks like.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fq3RR5wWZzU>

What are the requirements once I join the K9 team?

- Hiders: No requirements.
- Flankers:
 - In Field Support role: Attends 3 trainings per year.
 - As K9 Team member: 30% attendance of K9 monthly meetings and all-team trainings.
- Handlers:
 - 50% attendance of K9 monthly meetings and all-team trainings.
 - We require that you train a minimum of 16 hours per month.
 - Handlers typically train with their dogs 2-3 times per week. Please honestly consider if this level of time commitment will work for you and your schedule.

I'm not able / ready to join SAR yet. What can I do with my dog right now?

- Work on building all of the qualities we mention above. Socialize and expose your dog to all different kinds of environments, noises, people, walking surfaces, etc.
- Get your dog used to working his nose to find items. Hide a specific toy when he is out of the room and have him find it. Start with really easy ones, and as he gets better make them progressively harder. Do it inside, outside, and in different places. Be as hands-off as you can, and let him really figure it out on his own so that he can start to think and work independently. If he has a hard time finding the toy that you hide for him - does he persist for a long time to find it or does he give up relatively easily? That is an indicator of drive.
- You could also take an agility foundation class. This would help you build a relationship with your dog, and at the same time work on the dog's agility, body awareness, etc.
- Build toy and food drive, play, and engagement with you. That is a bit more complex, but is one of the most important things you can work on. It will help your relationship no matter what you do with your dog. Basically, you want to find something that your dog is so crazy about that he will do anything for. This is what he will work for, and this will be his motivator for search work. He has to be so driven for this reward that he will be willing to work for hours to get it. Once you find that toy, do not leave it out for him to play with at will - this will be a special reward for SAR only.

- This video by Denize Fenzi demonstrates how you can work on building tug and play skills with as little conflict as possible. <https://youtu.be/EiFswmlHvac>
- The same woman has a 4-book series that is excellent, but this one might be the best to start with: *Dog Sports Skills, Book 1: Developing Engagement and Relationship*, Denise Fenzi and Deborah Jones

Where can I get more information about SAR K9 training?

There are many great books and other resources out there to help you get started. There are several disciplines that search dogs can specialize in. It's good to have a basic understanding of the training process and the final work the dogs will do.

We typically recommend the book [Ready! Training the Search and Rescue Dog](#), by Susan Bulanda as a good starting point.

Contact us and we are happy to provide you with further resources.

Thank you again for your interest in the team!