



## Life With a Monkey Helper FAQs

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### **Q. Do monkeys go out in public?**

A. No, monkeys do not assist with tasks in public. Monkeys are trained to perform tasks within the home environment only. We believe it's important to respect our monkey's hierarchy and acknowledge that service in public would be stressful on both monkeys and their recipients alike.

In a placement home, once a bond has been formed and a recipient is given approval from their staff advisors, monkeys enjoy outdoor time with their recipients when weather allows. Many of our monkey-recipient pairs relish their playtime together in the backyard or on the deck or patio. During these times, monkeys are leashed to keep them safe.

### **Q. Is having a monkey like having a dog or cat?**

A. No – having a service monkey is more like having a small child. Monkeys require a lot of time, patience, and problem solving to develop a solid working relationship. This relationship you develop with your monkey is based on trust and respect (much like a child). You need to earn the trust and respect of a monkey before they will start performing tasks. Developing this relationship can take 6-12 months and the Helping Hands staff advisors are there every step of the way to guide you, your family, and your caretakers.

### **Q. What do you mean by monkey “hierarchy”?**

A. In general terms, hierarchy reflects how each monkey ranks individuals in terms of what role or purpose they have in his/her daily life. A monkey will typically place the recipient (you) then a primary caregiver at the top of the hierarchy, and assign an appropriate rank to other family members, caregivers, friends, visitors, and even household pets. The monkey will also perceive himself/herself as having a particular rank within the hierarchy, with some people above him/her and others below.

By understanding your monkey's natural behaviors, respecting this point of view, and acting responsibly, you will be able to create a positive living environment for your service monkey. It's important to understand that hierarchy is natural and not something that can be eliminated through training. We, as human caretakers, must respect the monkey's hierarchy and change our own actions and interpretations accordingly. The concept of hierarchy can initially be tricky to understand but if you are accepted into the program, this will be explained in great detail to you and your family/caretakers by Helping Hands' staff advisors.

### **Q. What kinds of noises do monkeys make?**

A. Monkeys make a variety of noises that vary greatly in pitch and volume. You will quickly pick up on monkey sounds when a monkey is placed in your house. Monkeys make a variety of grunting/squeaking sounds that represent different emotions/feelings. Excitement, happiness, anticipation, alarm, and fear are just some of the emotions monkeys express verbally.

### **Q. Are monkeys potty trained?**

A. Most monkeys that graduate from the Helping Hands are “potty trained.” (By potty trained, we mean that they return to their cage to go to the bathroom.) The floor of the cage is wire mesh and all waste falls through to a pan with papers below. Then the cage papers can be changed once or twice daily. Monkeys that are not

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*Established in 1979, Helping Hands, a not-for-profit corporation, breeds, raises, and trains capuchin monkeys to provide daily assistance to people living with spinal cord injury or other mobility impairments. Relying on private contributions, Helping Hands provides these specifically trained service animals and their lifetime support free of charge.*

*CFC# 11196*

541 Cambridge Street ● Boston, MA 02134 ● phone: 617.787.4419 ● fax: 617.787.5665

www.monkeyhelpers.org ● mail@monkeyhelpers.org

fully potty trained may wear diapers in a home. A care attendant will most likely have to diaper the monkey if the recipient is unable. It's important to remember though that any monkey may still have accidents if they are nervous or if something scares them.

**Q. How come you do not place monkeys with children?**

A. A monkey must place his/her recipient as "alpha" or the top of their hierarchy in order for the bond to be made and a working relationship to be formed. Unfortunately, a monkey will never choose a child as alpha, especially in the presence of other adults (Mom/Dad/caregivers). Therefore, the recipient-service monkey relationship between a monkey and a child would never be successful. There are no exceptions to this reality.

**Q. Why do you require that all children living in the home be over 12 years old?**

A. In our 30+ years of experience, we have learned that homes with small children are not the best fit for a monkey because kids are often unpredictable and cannot fully grasp the importance of a monkey's hierarchical structure and the need for a quiet, stable environment.

It's unfair to expect a small child who is pre-conditioned to thinking of monkeys as zoo animals or funny characters they see in movies and cartoons to respect and understand the complexities of actual monkey behaviors. Kids cannot fully comprehend that a monkey is there for service and not as a playmate. For this reason, we require that all children who are living in the household to be 12 or over prior to an adult family member's application for our program. Please understand that we cannot make exceptions to this policy.

**Q. How much does a monkey cost?**

A. We place our monkeys with recipients free of charge. All of the costs associated with training and placing the monkeys (about \$40,000 per animal) are funded by individual donors and foundation grants. There are however some long term financial commitments such as food, vitamins, shampoo, and a once a year veterinary wellness visit that we hope our recipients can contribute to but it's not a limiting factor for acceptance if you need some help with these costs. Helping Hands will cover all placement costs and any major medical care if the need arises.

**Q. What should my family or caregivers know prior to a monkey placement?**

A. Often times, the initial few months of a placement may be more difficult for caregivers and family members rather than the recipient. Often times the caregiver or family members end up doing the everyday monkey maintenance, but do not get the same affection from the monkey that a recipient receives. (In fact, we typically instruct family members and caregivers to "ignore" the monkey so that the bond with the new recipient is built.)

Initially a monkey placement may be seen as an extra burden for caregivers as they now must take care of the monkey in addition to prior commitments. As a recipient, you may also feel guilty assigning your caregivers additional chores. It is important to identify one primary caregiver who you feel will be responsible for most of the monkey care prior to the placement week. In fact, you should thoroughly discuss the ongoing commitment and responsibility that this family member or caregiver will have prior to applying for a monkey helper. Some chores your caregiver may have to assist with are: monkey bathing (at least once a week), nail filing (once every few weeks or as needed), changing cage papers (daily), changing blankets (daily), and feeding (daily).

**Q. What do monkeys eat?**

A. Monkeys eat several small meals throughout the day. The primary staple of their diet is commercial monkey chow. They eat chow three times a day and it is supplemented with whole oats, vitamins, vegetables, water,

and a small amount of apple and nuts. Because of their high metabolisms, between chow meals and snacks, monkeys typically eat about 6 times a day.

It is extraordinarily important to follow our diet guidelines exactly, as monkeys are at risk for developing Type II diabetes if they are fed inappropriately. Monkey chow is purchased through Helping Hands and costs roughly \$30 per bag. One bag of chow will last 2-3 months, depending on the monkey.

**Q. Do monkeys carry diseases harmful to humans?**

A. No – Helping Hands monkeys are New World monkeys, native to Central and South America. New World monkeys do not carry the zoonotic diseases often associated with Old World monkeys (from Africa) such as Herpes B, Monkey Pox, or Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV). Additionally, our monkeys are raised in a closed colony and receive periodic veterinary exams keeping their overall health status high. In fact, our monkeys are more likely to catch the common cold from human germs in your own home.