

## A Buddy for Sophie Adams



When Sophie Adams was four, she was diagnosed with epilepsy. Epilepsy is a disease. It is not a disease you can catch, though. You may be born with it. Sometimes a severe blow to the head can cause epilepsy. Epilepsy causes seizures. Sophie had her first seizure when she was four. She blanked out and fell down. Then muscles all over her body started twitching. It was very scary for her parents. They didn't know what was happening.

They called an ambulance. It took Sophie to the hospital. There, doctors did a lot of tests on Sophie. They discovered that she had epilepsy.

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Epilepsy can be dangerous. Epileptics can accidentally hurt themselves during seizures because they can't control their bodies. Most epileptics don't remember what happens during their seizures.

Sophie started to take medicine—she still takes lots of pills each day. The pills help to stop her from having more seizures, but they don't stop all of them. Since her first seizure, an adult has had to be with Sophie all the time to protect her head and keep her body safe in case she has a seizure. An adult had to be with her when she played with friends. An adult stayed next to her all day at school. An adult went with her each time she went to the bathroom.

By the time she turned nine, Sophie was sick and tired of having an adult around her all the time. She wanted privacy and time alone with her friends. She wanted to walk to her friend's house by herself. She wanted to be more independent.

Sophie's parents understood and wanted to help Sophie be more independent, too. They heard about a special program that trains dogs to help people with epilepsy. A service dog is specially trained to help people. Training a service dog takes two years and costs about \$25,000, but there are many organizations out there that help families pay these costs.



On Sophie's tenth birthday, her parents gave her a surprise: they introduced her to her new service dog, Buddy. Buddy is a beautiful black Standard Schnauzer with wiry hair and a full beard.

"I love that he has a beard," laughs Sophie.



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Now that she has Buddy, Sophie doesn't need to have an adult around her all the time. Buddy goes with her everywhere and can sense if she's going to have a seizure. He alerts her by sitting up and barking.

When Sophie has a seizure, Buddy helps by crawling under her and supporting her head. This cushions her head and keeps her from banging it against the floor.

Sophie is thrilled with her new Buddy. He goes everywhere with her. He lies next to her chair in the classroom. He runs next to her during P.E. He even goes with her to the bathroom. She doesn't mind. Sophie is so much happier these days. She feels more independent—more like a regular kid.

"Buddy is my best buddy," Sophie likes to tell people. And she means it!

