

ACCESS & ETIQUETTE



WHEN YOU MEET A PERSON WHO IS BLIND

- Treat a person who is blind the same as you would anyone else. They do the same things as you do, but may use different techniques.
- Speak in a normal tone of voice. Blindness doesn't equal hearing loss.
- Talk directly to a person who is blind, not to their companion. Loss of sight is not loss of intellect.
- When entering a room, identify yourself; when exiting, be sure to mention that you are leaving. Address the person by name so they will know you are speaking to them.
- If you leave a person who is blind alone in an unfamiliar area, make sure it is near something they can touch—a wall, table, rail, etc. Being left out in empty space can be very uncomfortable.
- Be sure to give useful directions. Phrases such as “across the street” and “left at the next corner” are more helpful than vague descriptions like “over there.”
- Don't worry about using common, everyday words and phrases like “look,” “see,” or “watching TV” around a person who is blind.

- If a person looks as though they may need assistance, ask. They will tell you if they do. If a person who is blind is about to encounter a dangerous situation, voice your concerns in a calm and clear manner.
- Pulling or steering a person who is blind is awkward and confusing — it's really not helpful. Avoid grabbing their arm, and please don't touch or steer a guide dog's harness.
- Ask, “Would you like me to guide you?” Offering your elbow is an effective and dignified way to lead someone who is blind. Do not be afraid to identify yourself as an inexperienced sighted guide and ask for tips on how to improve.
- Be considerate. If you notice a spot or stain on a person's clothing, tell them privately (just as you would like to be told).
- In a restaurant, give clear directions to available seats. Your offer to read the menu aloud may be appreciated, but you shouldn't assume the person would not want to order their own food.
- When the food arrives, ask if the person would like to know what is on their plate. You can describe the location of food items by using clock positions: “Your coffee is at 3 o'clock”; “The sugar is at 1 o'clock.”
- Leave doors all the way open or all the way closed — half-open doors or cupboards are dangerous. Don't rearrange furniture or personal belongings without letting the person know.
- Be sensitive when questioning someone about their blindness. This is personal information and boundaries should be respected.

Guide Dogs for the Blind
 guidedogs.com | 800.295.4050



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people and dogs. optimizing the unique capabilities of

Guide Dogs for the Blind envisions a world with greater inclusion, opportunity, and independence by

VISION STATEMENT

lives by creating exceptional partnerships between people, dogs, and communities.

Guide Dogs for the Blind empowers

MISSION STATEMENT

WHEN YOU MEET A WORKING GUIDE DOG TEAM

- As tempting as it may be to pet a guide dog, remember that this dog is responsible for leading someone who cannot see. The dog should never be distracted from that duty. A person's safety may depend on their dog's alertness and concentration.
- It is okay to ask someone if you may pet their guide. Many people enjoy introducing their dogs when they have the time. The dog's primary responsibility is to its blind partner and it is important that the dog not become solicitous.
- A guide dog should never be offered food or other distracting treats. Food rewards are used as a motivational and training tool by GDB both in our dog training and by our alumni with their working guide dogs, but those rewards are only given to the dogs by their handlers.
- Although guide dogs cannot read traffic signals, they are responsible for helping their handlers safely cross a street. Calling out to a guide dog or intentionally obstructing its path can be dangerous for the team as it could break the dog's concentration on its work.



- Listening for traffic flow has become harder for guide dog handlers due to quieter car engines and the increasing number of cars on the road. Please don't honk your horn or call out from your car to signal when it is safe to cross, which can be distracting and confusing. Be especially careful of pedestrians in crosswalks when turning right on red.
- It's not all work and no play for a guide dog. When they are not in harness, they are treated in much the same way as pets. However, for their safety they are only allowed to play with specific toys. Please don't offer them toys without first asking their handler's permission.
- In some situations, working with a guide dog may not be appropriate. Instead, the handler may prefer to take your arm just above the elbow and allow their dog to heel. Others will prefer to have their dog follow you. In this case, be sure to talk to the handler and not the dog when giving directions for turns.
- You may encounter a guide dog wearing a head collar, which is a humane training tool that helps a dog become calm and focused when distracted. The head collar is not a muzzle and is designed to permit the dog to fully open its mouth and can even be worn when the dog is eating, drinking, or playing.
- Access laws in the U.S. and Canada, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, permit guide dogs to accompany their handlers anywhere the general public is allowed, including taxis and buses, restaurants, theaters, stores, schools, hotels, apartment and office buildings. Guide dogs are trained to stand, sit, or lie quietly in public places when not leading.



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