



**How to guide and support
people with sight problems**

www.vistablind.org.uk

Introduction

The aim of this booklet is to provide some guidance on how you can help and guide someone with a sight problem. Please remember though that everyone is different and they may choose for you to help them in a different way that works for them.

It is important not to make assumptions about what a person can and cannot see. Just because someone uses a white cane or has a guide dog does not mean that they have no sight. Only 4% of people who are registered blind have no sight at all.

If the person has a white cane with red bands or a guide dog with a red and white harness, it means that they have hearing loss as well as sight loss.

Guiding

Do not be afraid to ask if somebody needs help; often people think they do not know how to help. But it's easy - here are just a few basic tips:

- Remember to ask first if someone needs help
- Introduce yourself by name and say who you are
- Refer to the person by name where possible so that they know you are talking to them

- Speak clearly and give clear instructions, but be mindful of being overly forceful
- Check which side the person you are guiding would like you to stand
- Allow the person time to take your arm securely before you move
- Keep your guiding arm still and as relaxed as possible
- Match the pace of the person you are guiding and do not try to push or pull them
- Allow adequate room around any obstacles and give instructions that they are near a potential obstacle
- If there is a change in ground surface or a step, make sure that you inform the person and take time for them to adjust
- Explain any loud noises that might occur
- Bear in mind that older people or people with other disabilities may need additional considerations.

Basic Techniques

Many people will be used to being guided by holding an arm. Others may wish to be guided by putting a hand on your shoulder or by just following you closely.

If the person wishes to take your arm, stand next to them and allow them to put their hand in the crook of your elbow.



This means that when you walk, the person will be slightly behind you, so remember to take your time and keep at their pace.

If the person who you are guiding has a guide dog, approach them from the side away from the dog. Never take hold of the dog's lead or harness as the owner needs to be in control.

Sometimes it is enough for you to walk ahead in this situation and the guide dog will follow you.

If you are unsure, just ask the person who you are helping and they will tell you what they want you to do.

How to approach various situations when guiding

Single file walking:

- Tell the person you are guiding that you are approaching an area where you need to walk in single file
- Move your guiding arm to the middle of your back
- The person you are guiding will step in behind you
- If there is a guide dog, they will drop the harness and allow the dog to walk behind them on the lead
- When you can walk side by side again, simply bring your arm back to the side of you.

Kerbs and roads:

- Inform the person you are guiding that you are about to cross a road and approaching a kerb, and let them know whether it is a 'kerb up' or a 'kerb down'
- Pause at the kerb
- Say when you start to move again and allow time for the person to step up or down with you.



Pedestrian crossings:

- Whenever possible, it is safer to use a pedestrian crossing when crossing the road
- There is a button fitted beneath the push-button units at pedestrian crossings in the UK, which is for visually impaired people to feel
- The button is actually a rotating tactile cone. When the green man is displayed on the traffic light, the cone starts turning, which is a signal that it is safe to cross the road
- The person is able to detect the movement of the cone with their hand and can cross the road.

Steps, stairs and slopes:

- Tell the person you are guiding that you are approaching steps or a slope and whether they go up or down
- If there is a hand rail, they should be on the side of the rail if possible. If this means changing sides, stop and ask them to stand still whilst you walk around them and guide them to the handrail
- If you are shorter than the person you are guiding, any arm movements may not be as pronounced, so make sure that you take the first step on the same side as your guiding arm
- If the person you are guiding has a guide dog, they may be okay with steps and slopes, or a combination of the guide dog and a hand rail if there is one.

Stepping up:

- As you go up steps, the person you are guiding will feel the movement of your arm as you step upwards. They will then start to step up. Remember that they will in effect be a step behind you.
- When you reach the top, tell them and allow them time to find their footing and resume their position next to you.

Stepping down:

- Always a little more difficult, but the same process as stepping up - walk one step ahead and tell them when you have reached the bottom.



Escalators:

- Escalators can be very difficult to use for a blind or partially sighted person, so please check that they are happy to use one
- You can always ask if the escalator can be turned off so it can be used as steps
- Guide dogs cannot easily navigate an escalator so find an alternative route where possible
- Whether you are going up or down, it may be best to allow the person to take the first step themselves as it may be too difficult to get both of you side by side
- If possible, move ahead of them so that when at the bottom or top you can guide them off.

Lifts:

- Lifts are much easier and can be negotiated relatively easily, but make sure you keep the person informed of where they are and in what direction the lift is going.



Doorways:

- Try to go through the doorway with the person you are guiding on the hinge side, and tell them in which direction the door opens
- As you go through the door, you will be slightly in front of the person you are guiding. They will place their hand on the door to find the handle, and close the door behind them.

Swing doors:

- Swing doors are a little more complicated, but tell the person what type of door it is so that they do not try to close it behind them

- It may be best to let them go through on their own. In fact, if they have a guide dog they will find this easier.

Revolving doors:

- If at all possible, an alternative should be found
- If there is no alternative, position yourself so that the person you are guiding is in the widest part of the door and keep them informed when they need to step out.

Automatic doors:

- These should not be a problem at all, but it is best to tell the person you are guiding that you are approaching an automatic door as they are often noisy.

Turnstiles:

- These can be relatively easy if you approach them in a single file
- Tell the person you are guiding what to expect and when they will be able to feel the barrier
- If the turnstile is very high, you may not be able to guide them through; instead talk the person through.

Automatic ticket barriers:

- In this situation, the person you are guiding should go through the barrier first
- Position them in front of the barrier with you behind them
- Place their ticket in the slot for them and retrieve it on the other side
- Tell them when to go through the barrier and when they have reached the other side.

Seating:

- Tell the person what type of chair they are to be sitting on and guide them to it
- Try not to back them into the seat
- Ask them to remove their hand from your guiding arm and place their hand on the chair. Tell them if you have placed their hand on the arm or back of the chair



- If the chair is positioned under a table, make sure that you tell them
- If the chair is on wheels, again tell them and hold the back of the chair to stop it from moving as they sit.

Rows of seats:

- More often than not, the person you are guiding will prefer to be led into the row of seats
- For this you may need to side step, so make sure that you take your time
- Guide them so that they are standing centrally in front of their seat and they will be able to sit down
- When leaving the seat, step to the other side of them so that you are leading the person out of the row.

Cars and taxis:

- Tell the person you are guiding what car they are getting into. If they are entering a 4x4 or a London taxi cab for example, the height and step into the car will be different from a normal car

- Explain which direction the car is facing and put your guiding hand on the car door handle. This enables the person to slide their grip down your arm to find the door handle, and then using their other hand to find the top of the car door
- They can then position themselves and get into the car
- You could open the car door first, but you must tell the person that you have done this for them
- If you do this, place your guiding hand on the roof of the car so they can position themselves
- If they are leaving the car, leave the car first and open the door and guide them out.



Buses, coaches and trains:

- Transport varies so much in terms of access, doors and floor levels, so this can sometimes be a little tricky
- Just go back to the basic rules, and ensure that you tell the person where you are, if there are any gaps, if the steps are high, etc
- You should go first and lead the person
- Walk in single file along aisles and use your guiding hand to show where any rails and backs of seats are.

Guiding children:

A child with a sight problem can be guided in the same way as an adult. Just remember not to grab a child's hand, still ask their permission.

If they choose to hold your arm they might not be tall enough to link their hand into the crook of your elbow, so you may just want to put your arm where they can reach. Or they may be more comfortable for you to hold them by their wrist instead of their arm.

Guiding people who are deafblind:

If the person you are guiding has a dual sensory loss, many of the principles will be the same to guide them but the ways of communicating with them will vary.

- Make sure that you speak clearly and face the person that you are talking to
- If the person does not respond, gently place your hand on their upper arm and leave it there
- You could also try tracing the alphabet on the palm of their left hand using either your finger or their right forefinger.

Other support

Communication:

- Introduce yourself by name and say what your role is
- Refer to the person by name so they know you are speaking to them
- Use clear speech - there is no need to speak slowly or to shout
- Be descriptive - phrases such as "it's over there" are not helpful. Explain things clearly and directly

- Think about your position in relation to the person
- If the person is deafblind, identify how they receive information (e.g. British Sign Language). If the person prefers written communication, use plain white paper and write on individual sheets so they can refer to them later
- Do not leave a deafblind person standing 'in space'. Always guide them to a wall or a chair
- If someone who is deafblind is being supported by another person, direct conversation to them, not their companion
- Do not walk away without saying you are going.

Accessibility:

- Make sure that there is good, even lighting
- Look for ways to create colour contrast, e.g. on handrails and around door frames
- Keep the decor plain and ensure that all areas are clutter free
- Look out for potential trip hazards
- Keep the environment consistent - don't move things around.

Production of printed information:

- Use a clear, plain font such as Verdana, Arial, Century Gothic or Tahoma
- Use lower case, not capitals, as capital letters give no shape to the words
- Use square bullet points, as they help to line up text across the page
- Avoid placing print over an image or splitting text around an image
- Black on yellow is a good alternative to black on white, which may cause glare
- Paper with a matt finish is better than gloss, as it reduces the risk of glare and reflection
- Large print usually means 16 or 18 font, but many people will request an even larger size.

The Equality Act 2010:

Under the Equality Act 2010, service providers have a legal requirement to:

- Make reasonable changes to how things are done
- Make reasonable changes to the structure of a building to improve access or provide an alternative venue

- Provide information in an accessible format
- Provide auxiliary aids and services.

Alternative forms of information should be available, such as large print, audio, Braille or email.

Useful contacts

Guide Dogs provide mobility and freedom to blind and partially sighted people. They also campaign for the rights of people with a visual impairment, educate the public about eye care and fund eye disease research.

T: 0118 983 5555

E: guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk

W: www.guidedogs.org.uk

Vista is the leading local charity working with children and adults with sight loss in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Whether someone is newly diagnosed or has lived their whole life with reduced sight, Vista's specialist staff provide a vital lifeline to local people. Vista also offers training courses to help you learn how to support and guide a person with sight loss.

T: 0116 249 8839

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If you require the information in this booklet in an alternative format (e.g. large print, audio or Braille) or in an alternative language, please contact Vista on 0116 249 0909.

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