

# Open Doors: Access to Shops, Restaurants and Other Services for Guide Dog Owners

## Introduction

For many disabled people, including people with a vision impairment, an assistance dog is a vital mobility aid to help them with their independence. As with other customers, guide and other assistance dog owners want to feel welcome when accessing your business.

By law, disabled people accompanied by their working assistance dogs, including guide dogs, have the right to access taxis, shops, restaurants, and other places open to the public. Access refusals can be an upsetting and humiliating experience for people, which can have a significant impact on guide dog owners' confidence and independence.

This guidance is for all staff of businesses or other services and covers how to support customers that are guide dog owners, and is for informational purposes only. For advice on the law, please consult with a solicitor or the organisations listed at the end of this guidance.

## About guide dogs

Guide dogs are working animals, not pets, and their owners rely on them for independence and mobility. They have up to two years of intensive training and receive further training throughout their working lives. Guide dogs do not disrupt the everyday operation of businesses or premises. They are trained to sit at their owner's feet at all times, not to bother other people and not to climb on furniture.

Guide dogs will be recognisable from their harness, and many guide dog owners will carry an ID book with them. However, it is important to note that not all types of assistance dogs wear harnesses, and there is no requirement to carry ID.





It is also important to know that guide dogs and other assistance dogs can be different sizes and breeds. For more information about the different types of assistance dogs, please see [Assistance Dog UK's website](#).

## What the law says

Disabled people including guide dog owners and other blind or partially sighted people have important rights under the Equality Act 2010 in England, Scotland and Wales, or the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) in Northern Ireland.

The Equality Act and DDA in Northern Ireland provides for blind and partially sighted people to have the same right to access businesses and services as people who do not have a vision impairment.

This means that it is unlawful in all but the most exceptional circumstances to refuse access to a disabled person accompanied by a guide dog. It is also unlawful to provide an inferior level of service because of a guide dog, for example, excluding guide dog owners from parts of a restaurant, café or bar, or restricting them to an area where pet dogs may ordinarily be allowed. You are not allowed to impose additional charges because someone is accompanied by a guide dog.

Equality law includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people can access services. This includes amending a 'no dogs' policy to allow guide dogs.

Guide dog owners who are illegally refused access can take businesses and service providers to court

## Allergies or a fear of dogs

Assistance dogs are aids to support people with disabilities rather than pets and will not cause any disruption. You cannot refuse entry to an assistance dog owner because you fear or dislike dogs. Unless you are a taxi or mini driver who holds an exemption certificate on medical grounds you cannot refuse





an assistance dog on the basis of an allergy. For more information specifically for taxi and minicab drivers, please follow this link to the [Open Doors webpage](#).

## Hygiene

Guide dog owners are given training on how to maintain the extremely high standards of grooming which the dogs require, and the dogs are checked regularly by vets.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) have confirmed that guide dogs and other assistance dogs should be allowed entry to food shops and other food premises as their very special training means that they are unlikely to be a risk to hygiene in these premises.

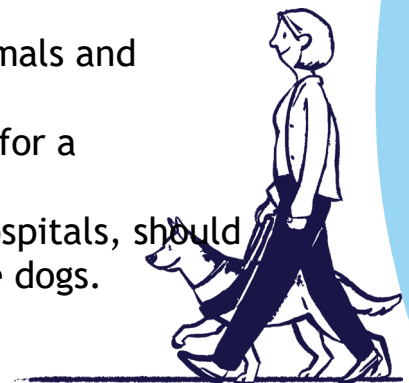
## Religious and cultural considerations

Religious or cultural beliefs can raise sensitive issues relating to dogs. However, religious grounds or cultural beliefs cannot be used to exclude guide dog and assistance dog owners.

Many religious and cultural groups have also agreed that assistance dogs are allowed in venues where they might not otherwise have been allowed. For example, The Islamic Shariah Council said that Muslim businesses should accept assistance dogs.

## Additional advice on supporting guide dog owners

- Amend any 'no-dogs' policy to allow for assistance dogs.
- You can display an 'Open Doors' sticker from Guide Dogs that states that your business welcome assistance dogs, which you can get for free if you contact us at [campaigns@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@guidedogs.org.uk).
- Never distract the dog. Check with the owner before making contact.
- Never feed the dog. Guide dogs are working animals and are fed a specialist diet at regular times.
- In seating areas ensure there is sufficient space for a guide dog so that it can remain with its owner.
- Large premises, such as shopping centres and hospitals, should consider providing a toileting area for assistance dogs.





- You can find out more about how you can assist a visually impaired customer by following this link to the [Guide Dogs website](#).

Remember that a guide dog owner is no different from any other customer. They should be treated with the same level of courtesy afforded to all customers.

## Other organisations

### **Equality and Human Rights Commission:**

The Equality and Human Rights Commission operates in England, Scotland (along with the Scottish Human Rights Commission), and Wales  
[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

### **Scottish Human Rights Commission:**

[www.scottishhumanrights.com](http://www.scottishhumanrights.com)

### **Northern Ireland (Equality Commission):**

[www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)

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