

How are guide dogs trained?



Aims

To explore the training needed to help a puppy develop into a guide dog, including the role of expert staff and volunteers. To learn about the different breeds that make excellent guide dogs and the skills a guide dog needs to learn so they can change the life of a person with sight loss.

Outline

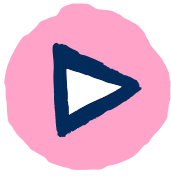
- Starter – [Angharad and Sarah video](#)
- Starter training cards
- Activity – Guide Dogs application
- To finish – recall and discussion
- Activity – group handout
- Activity – learner handout



Starter



Print and cut out 1 set of activity cards



Play the Angharad and Sarah video



Whole group ordering of activity cards



Explain to the group that Guide Dogs breeds and trains more dogs than any other organisation in the world. Each year they look after more than 7,000 dogs – including puppies, dogs in training and qualified guide dogs!

Play the video to see Angharad introduce us to her guide dog Sarah.

Angharad explains how Sarah helps her to live the life she chooses and discusses the stages of training from pup to partnership. The skills that Sarah demonstrates while guiding Angharad are broken down and shown being learned by a guide dog in training.

Discuss: when did Angharad tell us it was and wasn't okay to say hello to or pat a guide dog? Why?



Work as a whole group to order the activity cards with the training journey stages.

Ask six young people to come forward and take one random card each to read out to the rest of the group. With help from the whole group, and remembering information from the video, these six people should put themselves in order of a guide dog's timeline, from birth to retirement.

Correct order = C, F, D, B, A, E.



Activity



Print out the group handout



Print out the learner handout



Pens and pencils for writing and drawing

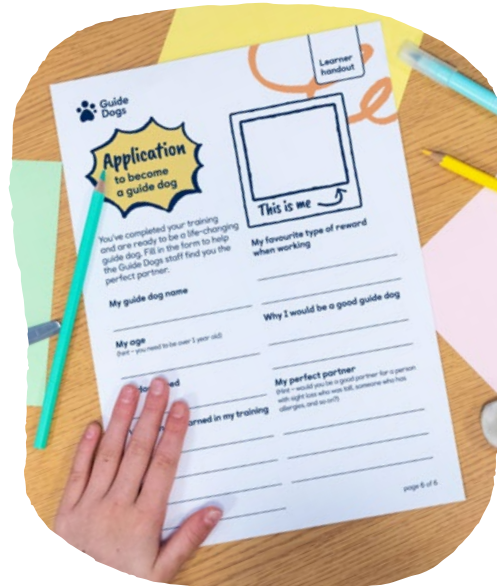
Guide Dogs application!

Ask the young person to select one of the guide dog breeds from the 'Our breeds' group handout.

Ask them to imagine they are this dog and they need to complete their 'Application to become a guide dog' learner handout.

They can write down information about themselves as this dog and explain why they should be considered for the important role.

For example, they might pick up new skills quickly; will do anything for food; work well in a team; are very clever; and will be confident on all transport, etc. Through this activity, young people can apply what they have learned about the breeds, skills and training of a guide dog.



To finish



Discuss naming
a guide dog

Naming guide dogs

Guide dogs are given their names at the Guide Dogs National Centre before they go to live with a volunteer Puppy Raiser.

Names are chosen for a variety of reasons:

- Some will have been chosen by fundraisers through the 'Name a Puppy' scheme.
- Some may have a theme to link into a current event like Christmas – for example, Pudding, Marley or Sprout. These may be available to sponsor by the public to help raise vital funds, which also enables people to share in the pup's journey into a partnership through regular updates.
- Others may be chosen so that all the litter start with the same letter of the alphabet. This can be a little difficult with some letters – imagine a litter of puppies all needing a name beginning with Z!

Discuss in the group what would be a good name for a guide dog.



Suggested names will ideally be two syllables and can't rhyme with training commands, e.g., no 'Lizzie' as it rhymes with 'busy' for the toilet command or 'Kit' as it rhymes with 'sit'. We also have to think about how trainers and future owners might feel in shouting out any unusual or creative suggestions!



Hello world – some very important puppies have been born! My mum and dad are very clever and healthy: us pups are born to guide. My mum lives with a volunteer and we stay in her cosy home for about 7 weeks.


 card
C

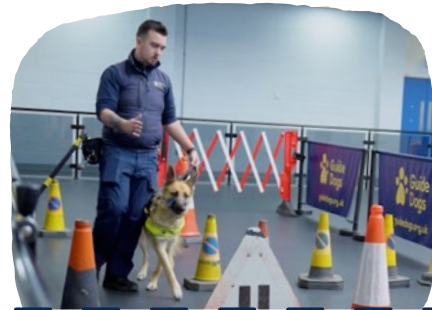
At 7 weeks old, it's time for the next stage. I go with my brothers and sisters to the Guide Dogs National Centre for important health checks. I'm excited to be a guide dog because I love being around people.


 card
F

At 8 weeks old, I go to live with a volunteer Puppy Raiser. They go to puppy classes with me and take me out in the car and even on buses and trains. I love learning... especially with all the rewards! Watch me do a 'sit'.


 card
D

When I'm over 1 year old, I start going to big school. I learn 37 different skills with a Guide Dog Trainer, like how to guide someone around obstacles. I'm so proud to be in my brown training harness!


 card
B

I've been matched! A Guide Dogs Mobility Specialist has chosen someone who walks at the same pace as me, has a home that suits me, and needs a dog for routes that I'm good at. We go to class training to learn how to be a team, then wearing my white harness, I'm a happy life-changing guide dog.


 card
A

My work is done. Most guide dogs work for around 8 years, but the decision on when to retire is different for every dog. My partner and I have looked after each other for a long time: now I get to have a happy retirement as a very important pet.


 card
E


Our breeds

What makes a great guide dog? It's more than just expert training. We choose breeds or types of dogs that have the right personalities too. Each breed has their own special qualities that will make them the right match for someone.

Labrador



I'm energetic, playful and strong, plus I love food and learning so am easy to train! I can be black, yellow or chocolate coloured. I'm very friendly, so I need people to be careful not to distract me.

Golden retriever



I'm calm, gentle, and tall enough to guide a person but also small enough to fit under a table, chair legs or on public transport. I love food and play which make great training rewards. I am golden, just like my name says, and my long hair needs brushing every day.

German shepherd

I'm very clever, loyal, brave and athletic. I love having a job to do! As a guide dog, I can be black and tan coloured or all black. I'm tall so I'm a good match for tall people. I like being with people so can't be left alone too long.



Labrador and golden retriever crossbreeds

Most guide dogs, like me, have a Labrador parent and a golden retriever parent. I can be either yellow, white or black and have a short or long coat. I always love learning.



Other crossbreeds

I'm a Labradoodle (a poodle crossed with a Labrador). I can have tight curls or a wavy coat and can be yellow, white, black, silver or brindle! Because of my hair, I can be better for people with allergies to fur. As well as Labradoodles like me, Guide Dogs use German shepherd cross golden retrievers and Labrador cross curly coated retrievers.



Did you know?



The first four guide dogs were German shepherds – Folly, Flash, Meta and Judy.

Application to become a guide dog

You've completed your training and are ready to be a life-changing guide dog. Fill in the form to help the Guide Dogs staff find you the perfect partner.

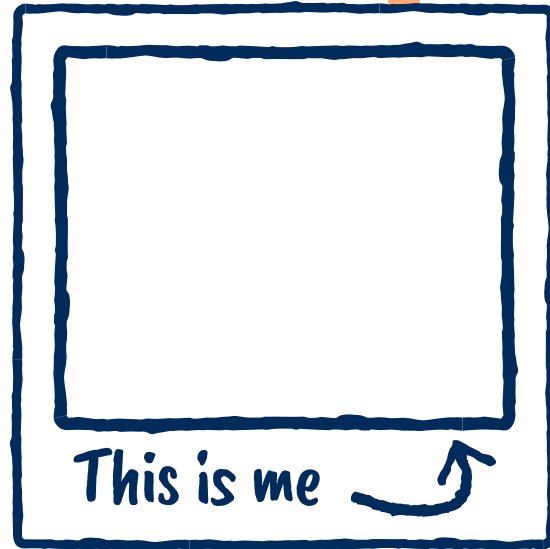
My guide dog name

My age

(hint – you need to be over 1 year old)

My dog breed

What I have learned in my training



My favourite type of reward when working

Why I would be a good guide dog

My perfect partner

(Hint – would you be a good partner for a person with sight loss who was tall, someone who has allergies, and so on?)
