



What does a guide dog do?

Aims

To explore how someone with sight loss and their guide dog work together to navigate a route. To understand some of the simple actions we can all take to help make routes more accessible.

Outline

- Starter – read to group
- [Guide Dogs in action video](#)
- Activity 1 – leading in pairs
- Activity 2 – journey plan
- To finish – recall and discussion



Starter



Read to the group



Play Chris and Chester video

Read the following to the class or group

“

Close your eyes. Imagine it's outdoor play now and you're going outside to meet your friends. Think about all the challenges you might face on the way – where is the door, is it push or pull, will you trip over anything or bump into someone, are there stairs, how many, when do they start, do you turn left or right, where are your friends in the playground...



How would that journey make you feel?



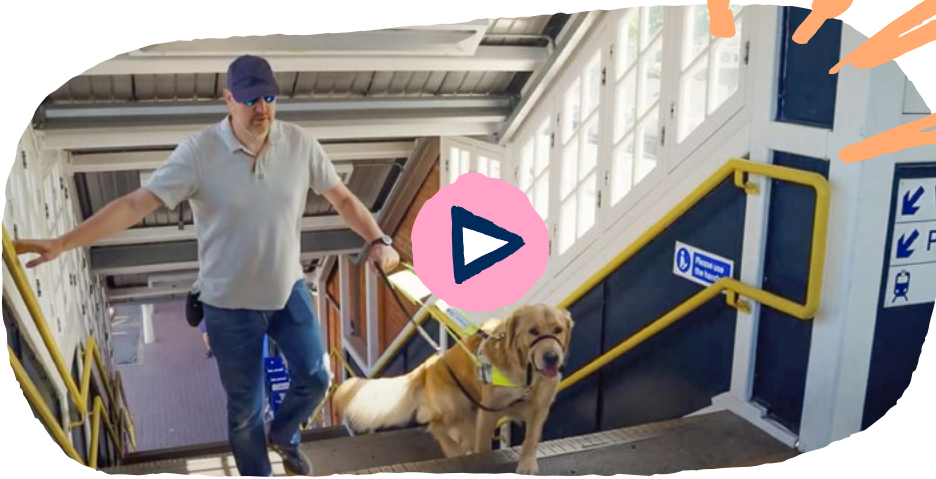
Now close your eyes again and imagine doing that whole journey again, but this time with your best friend at your side to guide you. You would be the one choosing where to go, but your best friend would be the one making sure you get there safely. They will let you know when there's a step or a doorway and help to steer you around any obstacles.

How much safer would you feel?



Your best friend can't always do this though, they have their own life and family and things to do. Guide Dogs offers people a best friend and a guide in the shape of fantastic, expertly trained dogs who give people with sight loss the confidence to get out and about safely. They call a person and a guide dog who work together a partnership, because they have to be a good team. The guide dog wears a harness with a handle so the guide dog owner can feel 'guiding tension' – for example, if the dog goes left or right, stops, or goes straight on, the person can feel this, follow and that helps to keep them safe.

”



Play the video to show a journey taken by Chris and his guide dog Chester.

The video highlights the potential challenges of navigating a route when living with sight loss and the ways Chester's guide dog training can help make Chris's journey safer. The video will indicate when to pause and discuss a question as a class/group. This will help the group learn some ways guide dogs help people navigate routes safely. Answers are given and explained in the video.

Discuss: which commands did Chris use with Chester?



Young people may have picked up that Chris told Chester forward, left, right, to the kerb, find the stairs, find the door, and under. Plus, there was lots of 'good boys' and even a treat!

Did you know?

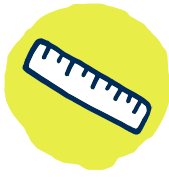


Guide dogs learn 37 different skills to help their partner get around safely by walking in a straight line from kerb to kerb while avoiding obstacles. They are also trained to locate objects such as doors and bus stops, problem solve, and be co-operative in their own care.

Activity 1



Paired activity



Ruler for each pair



Leading in pairs

This activity consists of one young person leading their partner on a route, whilst they both hold onto an object that represents the guide dog harness handle, something rigid such as a ruler. This simulates the movement of a guide dog (the guiding tension) for the person being led to feel and follow. The person being led needs to let the other person lead and follow them through this guiding tension wherever they go.

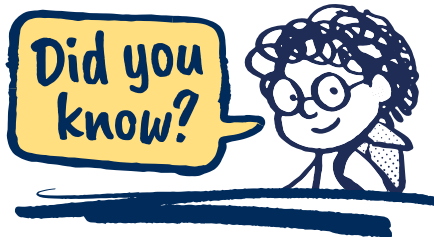


Use a large, safe space such as a hall and have a start and a finish line.

You may want to add in objects to steer round or to imitate real life obstacles such as road crossings or cars parked on the pavement. You could even try some of the commands featured in the video, such as 'forward' or 'find the chair'.

Depending on your group size, you may want to have smaller groups doing this activity whilst others watch and feedback at the end to evaluate the partnerships on show.

From this activity, young people can discover how it might feel to be guided in a way similar to a guide dog, picking up on the movement of the leader as they go around obstacles when walking along a route and when they stop. They'll also learn about using commands and the best position to work in as a partnership.



Guide Dogs trainers use this exercise to give people a taster of how a guide dog could support them. It teaches how to hold the handle, what position to be in when walking with a guide dog, basic commands, and how it feels to use guiding tension on a route.



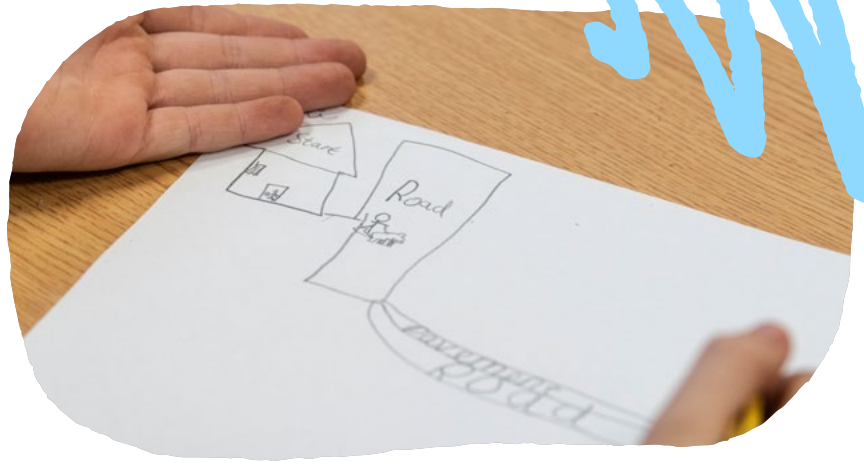
Activity 2



Individual activity



Paper and pencil each



A journey plan for a guide dog

When a new guide dog partnership is training, Guide Dogs staff help them practice the routes they will take regularly together. The guide dog then becomes familiar with a few key journeys which helps them learn about obstacles they will encounter and objects they may be asked to find, such as crossings.

Ask children to think of a journey that a guide dog partnership could take around your school or community.

This should be one that learners know well from memory or could physically retrace during the session.

Learners should draw the journey plan from start to finish, whilst thinking of any points on the route that need navigating.

Using pictures or text, these challenge points should be marked onto the journey plan, along with how learners think they would be tackled by the guide dog partnership. For instance, to enter the building, the young person could draw the guide dog owner telling the guide dog to 'find the door'.

The following could be marked on the journey plan:

- **Key points that need navigated**

Mark onto the plan features such as roads or stairs (how many, up/down, any corners?), doors (which way do they open?), obstacles (posts, bins, anything low hanging).

- **Points where the guide dog could guide the owner**

When would the guide dog help and what commands would be needed?

- **Points where a guide dog owner makes the decision**

When might the guide dog owner need to use their hearing or other senses? For example, at a road crossing you would need to listen for any traffic noise.

- **The young person's opinion of what the biggest challenge for the guide dog partnership would be on their journey plan.**

For older learners, this work might then be used as the basis for descriptive writing.

To finish



Question and discussion for the group

Can learners name three things a guide dog is trained to do to help a person with sight loss?

Young people might mention guiding people around objects, stopping at kerbs, and finding specific objects. An interesting alternative question is 'what doesn't a guide dog do?' to see if they understand that it is a partnership and guide dog owners play an equal part in this.



Discuss: is your school or community an easy place for a person with sight loss to navigate?



How could different groups (young people themselves, adults, community leaders) improve the accessibility? An example might be young people not leaving their bikes scattered on the pavement if they go into a building, adults not parking on pavements, and community leaders ensuring there are traffic crossings.



Why not use this final discussion as a starting point for persuasive letter writing or poster making to convince others to help improve the accessibility of the school or community?