

Interactive sessions for primary-aged children in a school or youth group setting

These sessions are provided for those occasions when you have extra time with a group of children and would like to cover something in addition to your own inspirational Guide Dogs story. The plans are intended for a class or youth group setting but they can be used with a larger group in an assembly if you ask school staff to select volunteers from the audience to come up and do the interactive parts, explaining what they are doing/feeling to the rest of the group.

Each session roughly takes 20 minutes, including time for your own story.

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Session 1. Let's look at coins (5-11 years)

This session introduces sight loss and some of the everyday challenges people with sight loss face. Although cash is becoming less frequent in use nowadays, money is still in the curriculum for children of this age to learn about and it demonstrates a relatable everyday challenge.

Equipment needed:

Take a mix of coins with you in bags (non-see through and big enough for people to put their hand in).

Introduction - 5 minutes

Today I'd like us to think about our eyesight and try to understand what it might mean to live with sight loss. This can be difficult to talk about but it's important as it can affect anyone.

I'm going to say a sentence and I want you to think if it's true (correct, right) or false (not right).

Most blind people can't see anything at all.

Now say your answer - 1,2,3...tell me!

It was actually...false! Only about 4% of those registered blind see nothing at all. Most people have some vision. Exactly what each person see is unique to them and can change from day to day - maybe from tiredness or because of how light or dark it is.

We all see the world differently. You might not be able to see certain colours, or you might need glasses to adjust your vision. You could have an eye condition that causes you to lose some of your sight, or you might not be able to see anything at all. One way people's vision can be affected is called tunnel vision - put your hands in front of your eyes and make a fist but leave a small gap, like you are looking through binoculars. You should just about be able to see through the middle, but if you want to see your feet or the ceiling, you'll need to move your head. You can only see small areas at a time.

Ask the group: how do you think seeing like this would affect your everyday life?

We're going to try and understand this a bit more by thinking about one example from everyday life - paying with money, maybe you're at a shop or handing over your bus fare. Ask the group: how do *you* usually identify different coins; how do you tell 20p from 1p? So, while *you* may know it's 20p through the number written on it, its colour, or what shape you can see it is, a person with sight loss might not be able

to get all this information from just looking and might have to use one of their other senses. Ask the group to consider: how would you know what coins you were using if you had little or no sight?

Activity - 5 minutes

Group leader/ teacher to split the group into sub-groups and give a bag of coins to each group. Speaker to ask them to find a certain coin in their bag without looking, make sure most people in each group get to have a go. You could even ask them to make up a total, for example 75p, and get them to role play doing this for an impatient shopkeeper/bus driver and a queue behind them.

Discussion and reflection - 2 minutes

Ask the group: How did you get on? What was difficult? Was there anything that made it easier? Reinforce the fact that coins are different sizes and that some have different edges to help people who can't see identify them more easily using touch.

Summary and story - 5 minutes or more

People with sight loss may take a bit more time to find the right money when they are shopping, you can help by being patient. How else do you think you could help a person with sight loss? Reinforce not distracting a working guide dog, not leaving bikes scattered on pavements so that routes are clear, how to politely approach someone and ask if they need help, etc.

In what other circumstances would a person with sight loss use touch to give them information about the world around them to support information from sight? Braille would be a good example, but this is also an opportunity to talk about different Guide Dogs services (how guide dogs guide by feeling them move round obstacles through the harness handle, long cane training, etc.). If you have already spoken to the group leader about fundraising and know this is already planned, this would be a good time to link in how fundraising money helps, e.g., raising just £29 could pay for a child to have an hour of support with one of our habilitation specialists, who would teach them a range of skills so they can do all the same things as their friends, including how to use a long cane.

Story - pick one of our life changing stories or use one of your own.

Further activities the leader can do with the group: braille activity sheets.

Session 2. Story Sack (3-7 years)

This session explains how guide dogs are trained and highlights how people should behave around a guide dog.

Equipment needed:

Story sack - a bag containing around 5 items linked to a pup's journey from birth to qualification - these could include:

- a plush puppy toy or a photo of a tiny pup,
- collar and lead,
- brush,
- bowl,
- toys,
- training items like a whistle and some treats,
- puppy jacket or a photo of a pup in a jacket,
- photo of dog crossing a road with a trainer or their owner.

These could relate to your own puppy or to Hero from the story below.

Introduction - 5 minutes

Does anyone know which part of our body we use to see with? All of us see what's around us differently - some people might wear glasses and some people might not be able to see colours. Some people's eyes might work a little differently to yours so they might not be able to see what's around them very clearly. You might hear people say that they are blind or have sight loss, which means that they have trouble seeing, but that doesn't mean they can't do anything, they just learn to do things in a different way.

I'm from Guide Dogs and we're best known for helping people with sight loss by giving them a new best friend - a guide dog. Guiding means showing someone the safe way to go so they don't get hurt. I bet some of you have pet dogs at home, but guide dogs are a bit different to a pet. Guide dogs help people get out and about safely: they let people know when there is a kerb or when to go round a lamppost, they keep people safe and stop them from bumping into anything. They wear a special harness instead of just a lead so people can feel which way they go and follow them on a safe route. The harness also shows people they're doing an important job so they get to go into restaurants and shops where normal pet dogs can't go.

Explain that you are here today to tell them a story about our special life-changing hero dogs.

Story activity - 10 minutes

Ensure the children can hear you and see the props.

Option 1 - if you are a puppy raiser or guide dog owner you could tell the story of your dog, ensuring you cover the following key points and use the props throughout. Feel free to add age-appropriate anecdotes of your own dog, tell your (speaker) story throughout.

- Puppies leave their mums to start their adventures at approximately 7-8 weeks old (bring out image of tiny pup from story sack). They go to live with a Puppy Raiser and their family who teach them all about the world around them. They also make sure they have plenty of food, toys to play with, and treats when they are learning new skills (demonstrate these items).
- Puppies in training can often go into shops, on buses and into cafes. When they are out and about, they wear their blue 'Puppy in Training' jacket (show jacket or photo of dog in jacket).
- After about a year, a puppy goes to do its early training which is a bit like going to school but they learn how to be guide dogs. Here they have a trainer who will teach them how to help a person with sight loss. They learn to turn left, right, stop at kerbs and to go round things that a person with sight loss might otherwise fall over. When they are in training, they wear a brown harness with a yellow flash (show picture). They get treats and to play with their toys as rewards for learning.
- Soon when the trainer is happy the dog has learned to guide properly it can go on to become a guide dog and change someone's life.
- A Guide Dog Mobility Specialist will train the dog to be matched to the person with sight loss that they are most suited to. They look at how fast the person walks and what kind of places they visit every day to find the dog that's right for them.
- A fully qualified guide dog wears a white harness with a yellow flash (show image).

Option 2 - read Hero's Journey story.

Hero's Journey

Heroes come in all shapes and sizes, some have capes, some have superpowers, some are very brave and strong. Our hero has four legs and a waggy tail.

He started out as a little dog, with a very big future. When Hero was born, he was a tiny, wiggly, fluffy puppy, just like any other pup (show image of pup from story sack). He had 3 brothers, and 2 sisters who he loved to play with. He was a bit cheeky and very playful, but he was a good boy.

When he was 8 weeks old, Hero and his brothers and sisters were very excited because they knew it was time for them to go and live with a new human family. Hero's new human family came to collect him, and he soon settled in and enjoyed playing with the children in the garden (could show items like toys and brush from the story sack).

Hero was going to stay with his new family for a year and learn lots of new things that would be very important for him to know if he was going to become a guide dog. Hero went to puppy classes where he made friends with other dogs, and learned to sit, stay and come when he was called. He loved learning new things, with his family using treats (show from sack) to let him know when he had done something well. Hero was growing up fast, and as well as going to puppy classes, he was also going to lots of new places, learning about the world and all the different noises, and smells and meeting lots of different people.

Hero would wear his blue puppy jacket (show from story sack) so people would know he was a very important pup in training. He would go to the supermarket, on trains and buses, and into cafes with his family. He loved to do this, especially because other dogs weren't allowed. That made him feel very important.

Hero had learned so much from his puppy training, but he was ready to learn more, so off he went to Guide Dog Training School. Hero wasn't sure of himself at first. There were lots of other dogs there, some of them were wearing their brown guide dog training harness, and some of them were fully qualified guide dogs, wearing their white harness, and Hero was very interested to meet them, hoping one day that he would be clever enough to have a harness of his own.

Hero was paired with a trainer called Jackie, who gave him lots of praise and played with him and his toys after a training session (could show clicker or whistle and explain).

Training was fun. Hero learned to walk in his special brown guide dog harness and learned to turn left and right, and to stop at kerbs and walk nicely across the road. He wasn't worried about the noise of the cars or about people walking close to him because he'd been into towns before as a puppy, so he took it all in his stride. He then had to learn to guide a person around obstacles so they wouldn't walk into them. Things like lampposts and trees were easy for Hero to avoid, but he did find it annoying when people left litter on the floor or parked their cars on the pavements because it meant he had to pay extra special attention to avoid bumping into them.

The day came when Hero's trainer told him that he had passed all of his tests and it was time to match him with a person who would be his partner for the rest of his life. Hero was nervous, he wanted his person to like him, and he was also excited. This was what he had gone to school for - to be someone's guide dog. He was going to change somebody's life.

When Hero met Luke, he knew they would be the perfect match. Luke was born with an eye condition which meant that things were really blurry for him, so it wasn't safe for him to walk around on his own, in case he didn't see a car coming or he walked into things. This meant that Luke didn't get to go to school on the bus with his friends and wasn't able to go to the shops without his parents. Luke depended on other people, and he didn't like that. A guide dog like Hero would mean that he could go out and about by himself, and he'd have a new friend too.

Luke and Hero trained together to make sure that they were a good match. It was clear straight away that they were perfect together. Hero was very careful to walk at the right pace for Luke, and Luke was a bit worried about stepping on Hero, or dropping his harness, but soon they were working together perfectly.

Then the day finally came - Luke and Hero qualified! Hero was given his white harness, and his guide dog medallion which showed he was now a proper guide dog. Luke was nervous and excited the first time he and Hero went out together. He put Hero's harness on and tickled him behind the ears, and they stepped out of the door together on their first adventure of many. Hero felt so proud. He was a very important dog indeed; he was Luke's Hero.

True or false game - 3 minutes

Ask the children to listen to your sentence and decide if it is true (right) or false (not right). They can shout out the answer or put their thumbs up/down, whichever you prefer.

- “Guide dogs are superheroes.” TRUE. They help people with sight loss get out and about safely.
- “You should always stroke a guide dog when you see one.” FALSE. Explain to the children that it’s important not to distract a guide dog by trying to stroke it as it might mean they don’t pay full attention to guiding and that’s not safe. Ask them to tell their parents when they go home that you mustn’t distract a guide dog or a guide dog puppy who is training. You must never approach a strange dog without permission anyways.
- “A guide dog would help a person with sight loss to walk around a lamppost and not bump into it.” TRUE. Guide dogs keep people with sight loss safe by walking around objects that they might not have seen. People can feel them walking around it through the harness handle and so follow the guide dog on the safe path.
- “You should not leave litter or your bike on a pavement because it can be hard for a guide dog owner to get around.” TRUE. It’s important to pick up litter and not to leave your bikes on pavements or for people to park their cars on pavements because these are hazardous for people trying to find their way with a guide dog.

Summary - 2 minutes

Summarise your personal story and add your fundraising ask if agreed with the group leader. Explain to them that if they wanted to help Guide Dogs, they could do some fun activities that would raise money. Explain to them that the money they raise would go to help more people have a guide dog.

Anytime left can be used to introduce the class to your dog if you are happy to do so. Explain to them how to approach your dog and how to touch it - not being boisterous, being gentle and careful not to poke the dog in the eyes or mouth or to pull at ears, tail, or feet.

Further activities for the group leader to run after your visit

Group leaders could aim to complete our Puppy Graduation fundraising challenge, more details at www.guidedogs.org.uk/schools

Session 3. Shopping (5-11 years)

This session aims to build empathy and show that everyday tasks can be a challenge for people with sight loss. As well as talking about how Guide Dogs provides services to help, it gives an insight into the use of some assistive technology.

Equipment required:

- Some standard grocery items - tins, bottles, fruits, vegetables (each item should be priced).
- Any technology you use to help you shop.
- A few copies of shopping lists for the children to use.
- Blindfold and tissues for hygiene (use a fresh tissue between every person's eyes and blindfold).

Managing Risk

- The participants will be made aware that they can end the session if they feel uncomfortable under blindfold or unsafe at any time.
- Blindfolds used are clean and replaced as necessary and participants are briefed on how to use them.
- Check that the area is free from trip and slip hazards.
- Avoid using products that could leak or cause allergies.
- A full risk assessment is available on request
learning@guidedogs.org.uk

Introduction - 5 minutes

Ask the children how they help when they go shopping with their family - do their parents ask them to go and get things from the list? Then ask them to think about how they would do their shopping if they couldn't see? Today we're going to think about our eyesight and try to understand what it might mean to live with sight loss. This can be difficult to talk about but it's important as it can affect anyone.

Make a list of the challenges people with sight loss might face when trying to go shopping (give hints where needed). This could include - getting to the shops, finding a trolley/basket, knowing which order items/aisles are in the shop, using other senses or tech to find shopping items, items that feel similar, asking for help from the shop employees, and payment.

Activity - Blindfold shopping - 2 minutes - you may want to ask the leader/ teacher to provide 4 volunteers

Set out your items on a table - they should include a variety of different items like a bottle of oil, a bottle of squash, tinned beans, tinned tomatoes or fruit, bread, fruits and vegetables, shampoo etc. Get the two pairs of children ready - one in each pair is blindfolded and the other in the pair is to have a shopping list (with some of the items in the 'shop', not all of the items - also put different items on each list). The child with the shopping list calls out the items that they wish to buy and the child with the blindfold selects them from the items in front of them (they have 1 minute to get as many items as they can). Check their items against the list at the end of 1 minute.

Discussion and Reflection - 5 minutes

How easy/difficult was this? Did they get the items right? How did they choose the items? What senses did they use?

Speaker's personal experience - 2 minutes

If you have a vision impairment, you may wish to take some time to explain to the children how you find the items you need when shopping. Technology -there are technology/apps that people use to help them find items e.g., some supermarkets use braille on some items, you can use apps which describe items that you hold in front of a smartphone's camera. Note gauges and contactless payment/chip and pin - how do you know you are inputting the correct PIN number? Discuss online shopping.

Summary and story - 5 minutes or more

Shops and supermarkets can help people with sight loss by asking what they would like help with. Guide Dogs have trained staff in some supermarkets on how to guide people with sight loss around their store, we do this because it helps people's confidence when shopping. We help people with sight loss in many different ways like this, including providing some with a guide dog to help them get out and about safely to live the life they choose. When you are shopping you can help by not distracting the guide dog when it is working.

Story - pick one of our life changing stories or use one of your own. Remember to talk about suitable fundraising opportunities.

Further activities for the group leader to run after your visit

Group leaders can extend the activity by asking "Can you design something that would help a person with visual impairment do their shopping?" We have other STEM (Science Technology Engineering Maths) activities available on our website [guidedogs.org.uk/learning](https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/learning)