# Providing assistance for customers with sight loss including guide dog owners

Below you will find our hints and tips on how to make your premises more inclusive and how to assist, communicate with and guide people with sight loss including guide dog owners. This information has been put together based on the experiences of people living with sight loss.

Information relating to accommodating a customer’s guide dog can also apply to other types of assistance dogs. We hope this assists you in providing a high-quality service.

## What to know when assisting a guide dog owner with their guide dog

* Remember that a guide dog owner is no different from any other customer. They should be treated with the same level of courtesy and respect.
* Amend any “no dogs” policy to allow access for guide and other assistance dogs. Guide Dogs can provide window stickers saying your business welcomes guide and other assistance dogs.
* The best place for a guide dog is with its owner, who has both the skills and the relationship with their dog to ensure a high level of control. Where it’s not possible to keep a guide dog and owner together for example in a swimming pool or clinical treatment room, reasonable effort should be made to accommodate the guide dog in a safe and secure place, such as an office. The guide dog should be appropriately supervised and not left alone for prolonged periods of time. This should be discussed and agreed with the guide dog owner. Consider training staff or volunteers to support the accommodation of guide and other assistance dogs. Guide Dogs can provide further advice.
* Never distract a guide dog. They are working animals and distractions could endanger the person they are guiding.
* Never feed a guide dog. Guide dogs are working animals and are fed a strict diet at regular times; any additional food may cause the dog to be sick or could affect its health in other ways.
* It is helpful and may also be legally required as a reasonable adjustment, to explain the layout of your premises to a vision impaired person. Ask them what information might be useful before providing too much detail. Highlight potentially dangerous items. For example, maintenance equipment, fire extinguishers or mirror or glass walls. Items which may cause a trip hazard (trolleys etc) should be removed where practical.
* In seating areas (waiting rooms, reception areas, cafes etc) ensure there is sufficient space for a guide dog so that it can remain with its owner.
* Large venues (shopping centres, large hotels, campsites, transport hubs such as train stations etc) should consider providing a toileting facility for guide and assistance dogs. Contact Guide Dogs for further information.

## How to communicate with and guide someone with sight loss

* Ask the person with sight loss what assistance is needed rather than making assumptions as to what might be required.
* When addressing a vision impaired person, speak to the person, not their guide dog or anybody with them. Tell them who you are and what your role is.
* Talk to a person with sight loss like you would anyone else – do not be concerned about using language associated with the function of vision. An example of this, ‘did you see the documentary last night?’.
* When giving directional instructions, be sure to say left / right etc not here or there. Any directions given should be from the point of view of the person with sight loss, for example, there is a seat to your left. Do not point without providing verbal information!
* To guide someone with sight loss, stand by the person’s side and allow them to take hold of your arm (usually just above the elbow) so you can guide them along. You should walk one step ahead. Do not take hold of them and drag or push them in a particular direction.
* When guiding through a building or outdoors, tell the person where they are going and what obstacles or hazards you are approaching. Highlight in advance whether doors open towards or away from them and if it opens to the right or left, and about steps, kerbs or slopes going up or down. It may be necessary to allow time to adjust to prevent accidents.
* When guiding a person with a guide dog, stand on the opposite side to the guide dog and adopt the same procedure as above. Usually, a guide dog will be on the left side of its owner. Never take hold of the dog’s lead or harness and if the owner tells the dog to do something, do not interfere as this may confuse the guide dog.
* Find out more about how to guide by following this link to the [sighted guiding instructional videos](https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/getting-support/information-and-advice/sighted-guiding-instructional-videos/) or register to attend one of our free introduction to the Guide Dogs sighted guiding webinars by following this link to the [Sighted Guide Training](https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/how-you-can-help/sighted-guide-training/)

**Open Doors Campaign**

Guide Dogs ‘Open Doors’ campaign aims to end access refusals faced by people with guide dogs. We want to educate businesses and empower guide dog owners to put an end to this form of discrimination. You can find out more on the Guide Dogs website by following the link to: [**Guide Dogs current campaigns Open Doors**](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/opendoors)

**Further Information**

Visit our Useful Resources document.

If you require any further information, please email [**Information@guidedogs.org.uk**](mailto:Information@guidedogs.org.uk) or call 0800 781 1444.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission have issued helpful information for businesses regarding welcoming assistance dog owners. Please follow this link to: [**The Equality and Human Rights Commission Assistance Dogs: A Guide for all Businesses**](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/assistance-dogs-guide-all-businesses)

The information given in this document was correct as of May 2024. This document provides basic information and is not a substitute for legal advice.

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