



How to guide adults with sight loss

Top tips to help you be a confident and skilled sighted guide.



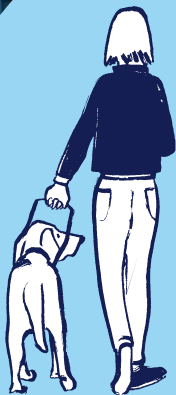
Introduction

There may be times when someone with sight loss needs assistance – even if they have a guide dog or use a cane. This might be when it's dark or the sun is very bright, when travelling somewhere new, if it's very crowded, or when obstacles are blocking the way.

Much like learning how to perform first aid, learning how to be a sighted guide is a useful life skill. It can give you the confidence to know how to act when you meet someone with a vision impairment, and the guiding techniques to offer help if they need it.



Brighthouse Bus Station



There are currently
**over
2 million**
people in the UK living
with sight loss and this
figure is expected
to double by 2050.

Top tips



1. Introduce yourself

A simple introduction is the first step, whether you're approaching someone who has just arrived, joining a conversation or when entering a room so they know you're there and who you are.



2. Always ask

It's important to always ask if someone needs support first. Never sneak up on them, grab them or assume they need help without checking. If they decline your offer, that's fine – please respect their response. Don't do something for someone just because it might be quicker or easier for you.



3. Adapt to people's needs

Asking open questions such as: "Do you have any preferences on how you want me to guide you?" or "How would you like me to describe the environment?", will allow the person you're supporting to maintain independence and autonomy.



4. Communication is key

When giving instructions or warnings about obstacles or hazards, remember to say “left” or “straight ahead”, rather than “over there”. When guiding someone, describe the surroundings – importantly describe changes in ground surface – so they can orientate themselves and are aware of their environment, but try not to overload them with information.



5. Guide dog partnerships

Please never distract or feed a guide dog when they are wearing their harness and working, as this can be dangerous for both the dog and their partner. If the person is holding the handle of the harness and walking with intent, please assume the dog is working. Sometimes, when someone with a guide dog needs assistance, they may place the harness handle flat on the dog’s back. If you think someone needs some help, it’s best to approach from the opposite side to the dog and ask. Please always speak to the person rather than the dog, as they will give their dog instructions and always ask the owner if its OK to pat or make a fuss of their dog first.



6. When leaving someone

When you’re moving away from someone, make sure you tell them clearly that you’re leaving. If you’ve been guiding them, always check that they know where they are and that they’re in a safe place where they feel comfortable.

Guiding someone with a vision impairment





Approaching someone and setting off

If someone would like assistance, ask them if they have a preferred side to be guided from. Then move to their desired side and ask if they would like to take your arm. Put your arm side by side with theirs, and they can reach up to your arm and form a 'C' grip, a relaxed hold, just above your elbow. When they're ready, start walking and they will follow around half a step behind. Look out for possible hazards and warn them about any upcoming obstacles, including anything at head height as well as on the ground. Also check the person is happy and comfortable with the speed you're walking.



Guiding through narrow spaces or busy areas

To guide through a narrow space or in busy areas, you can walk in single file. To do this, drop your guiding arm behind you and move your hand to the middle of your back, the person you're guiding can hold your wrist and follow in single file. Slow the pace and give any information about obstacles in the way. You may also want to extend your guiding arm slightly away from your back to create a gap between you and the person being guided. The gap prevents the person behind you stepping on tripping onto your heels. Return to the original grip when you've finished.



Crossing a road

Before crossing, say whether the kerb is a step up or step down, whether it's a deep or shallow kerb, and the surface. Pause before stepping so the person you're guiding can get ready. If you're leaving once you've crossed, describe where they are so they know which way they are facing.

Going up or down stairs and steps

Start by saying whether the steps go up or down, and the depth and width of the steps and if the steps have a bend or curve. The person's free hand should be on the side with the handrail. When going up, pause to allow them to locate the first step, then proceed – they will be one step below you. When you reach the last step, say so, and stop to let them find it with their foot. Going down, make sure the person you're guiding has located the handrail and the edge of the top step before you move. Walk one step ahead. You don't need to count the steps; just let the person you're guiding know when you reach the first and last step.



Getting into a vehicle

Place your guiding hand on the door handle and say if the vehicle is facing left or right. Open the door as wide as possible, placing your free hand on the open door. The person you're guiding can then locate your hand on the door. Place your guiding hand on roof and use your hand as a barrier between their head and the top of the vehicle so they don't bump their head as they get in.

Doorways

When approaching a doorway, say whether the door opens towards or away from you, and to the right or left. The person you're guiding should be on the hinge side of the door, which may mean you need to change sides. Open the door with your free arm and move your guiding arm towards the middle of the door so they can find the door. This means you can let go of the door and you can both walk through. If they have a guide dog it may be best to open the door, let them go through, and join them on the other side.



Changing sides

If you need to change sides explain this and the reason why. Drop both arms behind your back, crossing your hands behind you. They can then navigate down your arm and up the other arm to grip just above the elbow in a 'C' grip. If the person has a preferred side to be guided, revert back when it's safe to do so, using the same technique.

Getting on or off a bus or train

First, check if the person is happy to board themselves, or if they need assistance. Explain if there's a step up or down, or a gap to step on the train carriage or bus. They may wish to identify how big a gap is with a mobility aid first. Always explain if there is a gap, even if it is a small one, as a long cane could get caught in it. Check if they're ready to proceed, and then take the step across the gap together. If there's a railing to the side of the door, let them know and ask if they would like to hold onto it. Usually, the person will take the rail with their free hand and continue to grip your arm with their other hand.





To watch videos on these techniques or to find out more information about our sighted guiding training courses please visit: guidedogs.org.uk/guiding

