

Guide Dogs.

Welcoming people with low vision or blindness

Guidelines on Practical Inclusivity
guidedogs.com.au





Myth Busting

Only a small percentage of people are blind or see nothing at all. Do not presume that a person with a white cane or Guide Dog can't see you.

Not all conditions that cause low vision and blindness are outwardly obvious; it can be difficult to gauge a person's level of vision simply by looking at them.

Not everyone with low vision or blindness needs or wants help. If in doubt, ask them.

People with low vision or blindness do not automatically have heightened senses, like enhanced hearing. Using the other senses is a learned skill that requires specific training.

Just speak naturally to people with low vision or blindness. You do not need to speak loudly or slowly because of their vision loss.

Feel free to use words like 'look', 'see' and 'sight'. These are commonly used by people with low vision or blindness.

Greet the person out loud to alert them to your presence

Introduce yourself, as well as any other people in the room.

Be specific

Avoid using vague words like 'here' or 'over there' and do not gesture by pointing. You can use directional words like 'left' or 'right' but relate them to the person's position as in 'on your left'. You can also use the positions of a clock face to describe directions. For example. Your drink is at 'twelve o'clock'.

Ask first

If a person with low vision or blindness appears to need guiding assistance, confirm by asking: 'may I help you?' Do not grab or touch a person with low vision or blindness without warning. If your offer is accepted, touch your hand against the back of the person's hand and let them take your arm.





Guiding

Ask the person if they need assistance. If yes, let the person know you will move your hand for them to find it. Touch the back of your hand to theirs. The person will then hold your arm just above the elbow. Walk at a comfortable pace and avoid potential hazards.

Narrow spaces

Tell the person that you are approaching a narrow space. Slow down and move your guiding arm behind your back. The person will be able to step behind you.

Seating

When you place your guiding hand on the chair, the person will be able to find the chair and sit down. Describe the location of the chair relative to the room “the table is in front of you with a chair opposite, there is a place mat with cutlery set in front, a water jug and glass is at 2 o’clock”.

Guiding a person with a Guide Dog

If guiding someone with a Guide Dog, stand on the opposite side of the Guide Dog and offer your arm.

Alternatively check if the person wants to follow you. Guide Dogs are taught the word ‘follow’.

Just stay a few steps ahead and avoid calling out to the Guide Dog. Never grab the Guide Dog’s lead.

Maintain a safe environment

Aim to prevent a person with low vision or blindness having an accident by tripping on an object, knocking into a chair or becoming lost. Examples on how to keep the environment safe include:

- do not leave doors ajar
- do not leave objects on the floor
- push a chair in at the table when not used
- return things to their original place
- keep overhanging branches along a path cut back.





How to interact with a Guide Dog and their Handler

It takes a lot of training and concentration for a person with low vision or blindness to work safely with a Guide Dog. Please follow these tips to ensure that Guide Dogs and their Handlers can successfully navigate the community together.

- The Guide Dog must not be the centre of attention.
- Please do not pat, feed or otherwise distract the dog when it is working.
- Please do not grab onto the the Guide Dog Handler or the harness. Always ask if they need assistance.
- When you provide guiding assistance, please walk on the person's opposite side to the Guide Dog.
- People who work with Guide Dogs have been taught the most effective ways to control their Guide Dog's behaviour. Please only provide assistance if requested.

Preparing for a Guide Dog on the premises

A person who uses a Guide Dog has the legal right to access any shop, movies, an event, business and public transport including taxis and rideshares*.

Whilst there are no specific requirements for a business to makes special preparations for a Guide Dog on the premises, it adds to your welcoming and inclusive nature.

Consider the following:

- Introduce yourself and ask the Guide Dog Handler if they need assistance - Please only provide assistance if requested.
- Ensure the Guide Dog Handler is seated comfortably where there is enough space for the Guide Dog to lie down, and not be in a thoroughfare or where people might trip over it or injure it. Guide Dogs are trained to tuck under the Handler's seat or table if required.
- You may want to offer a water bowl that the Guide Dog can use.

*Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Australia and NZ Food Standards Code.

For more information call:
1800 484 333
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