



Guidelines for Communicator-Guides

working with a guide dog owner

1 How should I behave towards a guide dog in a person's home?

When the dog is out of harness and in the home it will in many ways behave like any other pet dog. It will most likely be very pleased to see visitors and will be eager to be made a fuss of.

It's important that the dog still maintains a good level of social behaviour even when in the home, which would include not being over excitable, barking excessively or jumping on the furniture. You can calmly stroke the dog, with the owner's permission, as long as it doesn't become too excitable.

2 Can I give the dog a titbit or make a fuss of it?

To assist with good behaviour don't give titbits, and if the dog jumps up don't make a fuss over it. Turn your back and ignore the dog, only calmly stroking him when he has calmed down. If the dog continues to jump up, a firm "No" will often suffice to discourage the dog.

3 Can I give sighted assistance (sighted guide) to someone with a guide dog?

Yes, though it's important to establish the person's preference first, and how familiar they are with the route. In some circumstances sighted assistance (sighted guide) may be a necessary part of the person's mobility, for example when crossing a busy road, if the person finds it difficult to assess the traffic in order to judge the correct time to cross.

It is particularly important that the dog is allowed to work as a guide dog, and if there is confusion as to who takes which role then the dog will not work properly and could lose his skills. If the dog is in a harness he will expect to be working. If, however, a human guide is guiding at the same time, then there is confusion. The owner can't concentrate on both at the same time and therefore neither method is safe.

If the owner can manage local routes alone and is able to get assistance from shop assistants, there will still be times when he or she needs the support of communicator-guides.

If there is a communicator-guide working with a guide dog owner there needs to be a clear decision as to whether the communicator-guide will be guiding, or whether he will work with the dog.

In certain situations, with the owner's agreement, it may be preferable to leave the dog at home for up to a maximum of three hours rather than take it around shops and other busy places. In these situations the communicator-guides can assist with mobility, and communication can be more straightforward.

4 What should I bear in mind when giving sighted guide to someone with a guide dog?

The dog should remain on the owner's left and be controlled by the lead. The handle of the harness should not be held but should remain resting on the dog's back, to let the dog know it's not taking any guiding responsibility. This is suitable for short distances but for longer distances it is preferable to remove the handle or in fact the harness itself.

As the guide dog is almost always trained on the left, changing sides when approaching doors would be problematic. Communication using the deafblind manual may also be more difficult, and adaptations to a usual way of working together may have to be discussed with the person to find an acceptable compromise.



Unfamiliar routes

If the owner needs to go to a place where he has not learnt the route then it is acceptable for the communicator-guide to guide him. If the unfamiliar place is visited as a one-off, or is not likely to be used on a regular basis, then there is no point in them learning to do the route independently and under such circumstances it is appropriate to use the human guide with the dog on the lead.

If there is a route which the owner is unfamiliar with, but which will be needed regularly in future, then it is worth them learning to do this. If it is a complex route it will probably need to be taught by a specialist. If in doubt contact either Guide Dogs direct or the Heads of Service, or Deafblind UK for further advice.

There may be some circumstances, for example when there are several people going out together, in which it is appropriate for the owner to work with the dog and they can follow the others. The dog, however, will still have the responsibility for avoiding obstacles and detecting down kerbs for which it has been trained.

If it is a simple route the owner may have judged, after having done it a few times with a sighted guide, that he can learn the route for himself. In order to be fully confident he may like to do the route a few more times with the communicator-guide following, as outlined above. Once the route has been learnt, and there is no need for communication assistance, then the owner can be independent with the dog.

When giving sighted guide no commands should be given to the dog, but a pause should still be made at each down kerb to keep up the dog's training.

5 What hazards should I be aware of?

Glass on the pavement can be a particular problem, and also chewing gum and street furniture.

6 What should I do if the person is working the dog?

If the owner and dog are familiar with a route which is used regularly, then they should work at this independently to keep up the skills they have learnt together with Guide Dogs' mobility instructors. There may be times when a communicator-guide is needed because of the owner's hearing loss, for example at crossings which they may be unable to do alone. In this case there should be an agreement that the human guide will 'meet up' with them at agreed points, such as the road crossing. Whilst the owner is working with the dog, the guide should not be physically close as this would distract the dog from working.

They may observe from a distance, but should only intervene in extreme circumstances. When anyone is following someone with a guide dog, it's advisable to carry ID as the public may think it looks suspicious if they see someone following a blind person.

7 Are there any access issues with a dog such as pubs, restaurants and shops?

Under the Disability Discrimination Act guide dogs are allowed into all establishments that provide a public service. Refusal could be deemed a contravention of the law.

Guide dog owners are also given a card from the Institute of Environmental Health Officers that states guide dogs are not a hazard in places where there is food, due to their special training. Showing this card can help improve understanding and avoid potential refusal of entry.

Some shopkeepers have suggested leaving the dog tethered outside but this is not an acceptable compromise.

8 How should a guide dog behave in social situations outside the home?

To maintain the good reputation guide dogs have, and the freedom of access they enjoy, it's important to be aware that guide dogs shouldn't be given titbits by anyone. It encourages them to look for food. The dog should be kept on a lead at all times except when free running in a safe enclosed area.

In restaurants, pubs or any situation where the dog is expected to lie down for any period of time it is more comfortable for the dog if the harness is removed.

9 Are there any other safety issues I should be aware of?

Dogs in the UK are not allowed on escalators and revolving doors should generally be avoided as the dog can trap its tail. Dogs should never be left unattended in a car. It's always good practice to wash your hands after stroking a dog.



10 What should I do if a problem arises?

From time to time issues do arise and although Guide Dogs' staff will make aftercare visits to their clients, problems can occur. Where safety could be compromised, or if the person is experiencing problems, it's important for them to contact Guide Dogs. Sometimes they may not be aware there is an issue, such as especially bad social behaviour or potentially dangerous working practices, and it may be enough to encourage the owner to contact Guide Dogs and ask for support. If the person is reluctant, a call may still be needed to ensure that the person's and/or dog's safety aren't compromised.

11 What happens if I transport a guide dog in my car?

All guide dog owners should have received training on how to get in and out of a car with their dog, but if you carry the owner and their dog with you in your car there are a few important things you should be aware of:

- If the dog is travelling in the back of the car, a guard should be fitted.
- The harness, lead and half check (type of collar) should be removed.
- The dog should wear its leather collar with ID badge, in case it escapes or there is an accident.

- If the dog is travelling in the footwell at the front of the vehicle with the owner, make sure its tail is tucked in before closing the door. In this situation the harness should be removed, but the lead should remain on the dog.
- The dog should have chance to relieve itself prior to the journey.
- Don't feed the dog just prior to the journey, and especially so on longer journeys.
- If the car has a passenger airbag, the dog must lie down to avoid potential injury in the event of an accident when the airbag might be activated.
- The practice of having dogs on seats is discouraged, but if there are no other options a car harness must be used (available from pet stores or manufacturers of equipment for dogs). This attaches to the dog and allows it to be secured to a seat belt.
- The dog should not be allowed to distract the driver.
- As a matter of courtesy the owner should ensure the dog isn't wet or dirty prior to getting into the car, especially if it has been free running (an old towel may be taken along to wipe the dog over).
- A blanket can also be taken along to help protect the seats.

Moving forward together



Guide Dogs

For further information about Guide Dogs please:

call 0870 600 23 23 • **visit** www.guidedogs.org.uk • **email** guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk
or **write to** The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, Hillfields, Burghfield Common, Reading, RG7 3YG

Guide Dogs is a company limited by guarantee registered in England
Company No. 291646 Registered Charity No. 209617