

Guiding



Action for blind people

Guiding people who are blind or partially sighted

There are an estimated two million people in the UK who are blind or partially sighted. Public or unfamiliar places can sometimes prove challenging for visually impaired people. Although many can and do find their way around on their own, on occasion, some will require assistance. The following guidelines should be used when approaching and guiding blind or partially sighted people.

Offering help

A blind or partially sighted person may well be unaware of you as you approach, so say hello before you touch them in any way. Ask politely if they require assistance - remember, not all blind and partially sighted people need help getting around! If help is needed, ask where they would like to go.

Setting off



Offer your arm for the blind or partially sighted person to hold just above the elbow. Keep your guiding arm at your side. Make sure that you are both facing in the same direction

and set off, remembering not to walk too slowly or too fast. The person you are guiding will walk half a step behind you and will be able to detect any body movements of yours that indicate a turn or a step. Some visually impaired people prefer to put their hand on the shoulder of the person guiding them.

The best grip is the one that the person being guided is most comfortable with. If you are unsure what grip the person you are guiding prefers, ask them.

Steps and stairs

As you approach a step or a stair, pause and say "step up", or "step down". When you reach level ground again take a step forwards, then pause to give the person you are guiding time to complete the last step. If there is a handrail or banister, say so. Some visually impaired people prefer to use their foot to feel where steps begin and end.



Single file

In a busy crowd, or a confined space, you may need to walk in single file. Move your arm around to the middle of your back, keeping it straight. The person you are guiding will move in behind you, extending their own arm to allow enough distance to walk comfortably. When the need to walk in single file is over, move your arm back to its original position and continue to walk half a step ahead.

Parting company

When the journey is over make sure the blind or partially sighted person knows where they are, the direction in which they are facing and where they should go next. When you leave them, remember to say that you are going so that the visually impaired person is not left talking to him or herself.

General points

- Take extra care when guiding through crowds or traffic.
- Use pedestrian crossings wherever possible.
- Keep your eyes open for potential hazards such as parked cars, kerbs, overhanging bushes, or rubbish bins and give the person you are guiding plenty of warning.
- Don't raise your voice when speaking to a blind or partially sighted person. Loss of sight does not necessarily mean loss of hearing.
- Help a visually impaired person into a car by placing one of their hands on the door and one on the edge of the roof so that they can guide themselves in safely.
- Let the person you are guiding know of any possible aid to mobility, such as guide rails, especially on buses or trains.
- Never distract a working guide dog by stroking, feeding or calling it.
- If you see a guide dog user at a crossing holding the dog's lead rather than the harness, offer to help in the usual way.



For more information about guiding or our Visual Awareness Training contact:

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