



How to be a sighted guide

Visual Impairment Service

How to be a sighted guide

A sighted guide is someone who knows how to use some simple techniques to physically guide a visually impaired person safely and discreetly.

This booklet describes and shows you these techniques. They will allow you to walk with but slightly in front of any visually impaired person so that you can alert them to stairs, doors, narrow spaces etc. particularly in unfamiliar surroundings and poorly lit areas.

As you guide it is also helpful to share verbal information to increase the child or young person's knowledge and awareness of the environment and to promote their active involvement in the journey.

Contents	Page
How to be a sighted guide	1
Steps to remember	2
Correct arm position	3
Narrow spaces	3
Finding door handles, stair-rails, seats	4
Doors	4
Sitting down	5
Change of level – kerbs, steps and stairs	5
Slopes	5
Ascending stairs	6
Descending stairs	6
Changing sides	7
Changing direction	8
General principles	9

Steps to remember

Introduce yourself – say where you are going – offer your arm

Your offer of guidance will usually be welcomed but some people with sight problems prefer to keep their independence when using a white cane or guide dog. Many blind people do have some useful vision but may welcome a sighted guide in unfamiliar places, at night time or when crossing a road.



Correct arm position

The pupil should hold your arm just above your elbow. This allows them to be in control and set the pace. A small child should hold either your wrist or your fingers but may need to hold your hand when crossing a road.



From the movement of your arm and body the child or young person will be able to feel changes in direction and level so try not to let your guiding arm wander.

Narrow spaces (e.g. doorways and crowded areas)

Warn the pupil that you are approaching a narrow space and that you will put your guiding arm behind your back to go through it. This way the pupil will not bump into anything or anyone as s/he will be shielded behind you.

Finding door handles, stair-rails, seats etc.

Use your guiding arm to reach for these so that the pupil can also use them by sliding his/her hand down your arm to find them easily.

Doors

Encourage the pupil to help you open and close doors. The guide should always be the first to go through the doorway.



Sitting down

Describe the seat as you approach it. Ask them to use their guiding arm to place their free hand on the back or seat of the chair. This enables the pupil to sit down independently.



Change of level e.g. kerbs, steps and stairs

Stop and say “step up” or “step down”. When using stairs the pupil should be on the side with the handrail if possible. As you go up or down the stairs the pupil will be able to feel the changes in your movement through your guiding arm.

Slopes

Pause just before you step on the slope and tell the pupil you are going up or down the slope.

Ascending stairs

- Say when you are approaching stairs and make sure the pupil is on the banister side.
- Stop at the bottom and use the hand of your guiding arm to locate the banister.
- The pupil then uses their free hand to follow your guide arm to locate the banister.
- Place one foot on the first step up to allow the pupil to feel the depth and to find the first step and let you know they are ready to walk up the stairs.
- The pupil walks slightly behind you.
- Say, “last step” as you reach it to give the pupil advance warning.



Descending stairs

- Say when you are approaching stairs and make sure the pupil is on the banister side.
- Stop at the top and use the hand of your guiding arm to locate the banister.
- The pupil uses their free hand to follow your guide arm to locate the banister.
- Place one foot on the first step down to allow the pupil to feel the depth and to find the edge of the first step and let you know they are ready to walk down.
- Walk slightly in front of the pupil and say, “last step” as you reach it to give the pupil advance warning.

Changing sides



Pupil holds your guiding arm with both hands.



Pupil stands behind you to locate your other arm.



Pupil moves across behind you to use your other arm with his/her other hand.

Changing direction



The pupil and you will be facing forwards.



The pupil and you turn to face each other.
The pupil will hold your free arm with their free hand



The pupil and you will both turn to face the opposite direction.
The pupil will let go of one arm to hold correctly for sighted guide.

General principles

- **Guiding pupils with other disabilities:**

The basic rules remain the same but some pupils may need to walk more slowly, take steps one at a time or adapt the way they hold on to your arm.

- **Giving information:**

Give the right amount of verbal information – not too little or too much.

- **Leaving:**

ALWAYS say when you are about to leave the pupil so that s/he knows you are going.

- **Independence:**

Pupils should be actively involved wherever possible e.g. helping to open and close doors.

