

Guide Dogs

- **Do not approach** a guide dog if the harness is up, this means the dog is working & should not be distracted. Distracting a working dog can be a safety risk to the handler.
- **Harness down/off** indicates the dog is not working, but you should always ask the owner's permission before approaching, patting or feeding a dog.
- **If assistance is required** the guide dog owner will ask. They will then place the harness down on the dogs back.
- **Guide dogs will be allowed** into a clinical area when attending for short visits such as out-patients.
- **In-patients who rely on a guide dog** are unlikely to be able to have the guide dog with them during their stay.
- **Visitors requesting to bring a guide dog onto the ward** should not do so unless authorised by the clinical IPC lead.



401 Sandygate Road, Sheffield, S10 5UB

t: 0114 263 0330

e: info@claremont-hospital.co.uk
claremont-hospital.co.uk

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www.claremont-hospital.co.uk



Assisting the Visually Impaired

A guide for patients and visitors



Part of Aspen Healthcare
www.aspen-healthcare.co.uk

Offering assistance to a visually impaired person

- **Don't assume that help is always needed** - always ask before providing assistance & don't be offended if it's refused.
- **Introduce/Identify yourself by name & role** - not everyone recognizes voices or remembers them.
- **Face the person & speak to them directly** - not through a companion or third party. Visually impaired people can hear & respond for themselves.
- **Avoid shouting** - most visually impaired people do have normal hearing. You should speak clearly if you know that a visually impaired person has a hearing problem.
- **Don't avoid or be embarrassed about using everyday expressions** - like 'see you later' or expressions with the word 'look' these words are not taboo amongst visually impaired people.
- **Always explain what the surroundings are** - especially if you are admitting a patient, offer to guide them around the room so they can get used to where everything is. It is important to inform a patient if you add or take away any items from the room. Explain any written instructions or information that is in the patients' room.
- **Avoid leaving someone alone in open spaces** - you should indicate a stationary object like a wall or chair which they can use as a point of reference. Always inform them when you are leaving so they are not left talking to themselves. Ask if you can do anything else for them & make sure they have everything they need close by.
- **Explain to in-patients when delivering meals** - what food/drinks they have on the tray (patients pre-order food, but sometimes forget what they have ordered).

How to guide a visually impaired person

- **Don't worry about making mistakes** inform the person you are assisting if it's the first time you have helped or guided a visually impaired person. They will help & reassure you too.
- **It's always good to use humour** a simple 'sorry' if something goes a bit wrong. It will not be the first or last time it's happened.
- **To begin ask** the person which side they wish to be guided on.
- **Stand slightly in front of the person** you are guiding, about half a step is usually comfortable for both of you.
- **Ask if they prefer** - to hold your arm or you hold on to them, this should be just above the elbow & on the side they prefer to use.

- **If someone needs extra support** for walking, bend your supporting arm parallel to the ground so he/she can apply weight lightly to your arm.
- **If someone is taller** than you are, it may be easier & more comfortable for them to put their hand lightly on your shoulder instead of taking your arm.
- **Give any guiding signals** only when a change in motion is needed. Signaling early can create confusion.
- **Be clear with instructions** & warn of hazards, including raised areas & changes in ground surfaces. Use words like **left, right & straight ahead**, not words like **over there** for example.
- **Don't overload** the person you are guiding with too much information, it can become confusing.
- **Never push or pull** the person you are guiding.
- **Guiding through narrow passages or doors** - when approaching a narrow passage or doorway, press your guiding arm backwards into the small of your back & this will direct the person to move into single file behind you. When approaching a door, stop first, then explain which way the door opens (towards or away) from you & whether it opens to the left or right. The person you are guiding can then move to the appropriate side, they may request you place their hand onto the door before opening & proceeding.
- **Guiding up/down stairs** - stop at the edge of the first step. Inform the person if the stairs go up or down & which side the handrail is on if there is one. Some people may wish to know the number of steps. The person will follow one step behind, holding your arm with one hand & the handrail with the other. Pause when you have completed the stairs & then resume sighted guiding.
- **Guiding up/down single step or kerb** - pause at the edge of the step or kerb & inform the person whether the step or kerb goes up or down. When completed pause & resume sighted guiding.
- **Guiding to a chair** - when approaching a chair you should inform the person where the chair is & where it is facing, the person can then decide where to sit. Place the person's hand on the back or arm of the chair & inform them where it is placed in order for them to sit down safely.
- **Guiding to a car** - place the person's hand onto the door handle; and with guidance have them locate the car roof with the other hand. They can then open the door and seat themselves. If for any reason they struggle, you can offer to assist and continue with sighted guiding until they are safely in the car with seatbelt fastened.