

Guide Dog Etiquette: A Few Tips on Interacting with Dog Guides and People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired - shared by Rev. Dr. Eric Pridmore

1. Please don't pet, call out to, or otherwise distract a working Guide Dog. Allow the dog to concentrate and perform for the safety of its blind partner. A Guide Dog in harness is "on duty", even when sitting or lying down.
2. If you are in a car, please don't honk the horn or call out directions. Guide Dog handlers listen to traffic flow and other environmental sounds to decide when it's safe to cross a street.
3. Please don't feed a Guide Dog. Diet and feeding times are strictly monitored to maintain good health and reliable relieving schedules.
4. If the handler looks like he or she needs help, offer your assistance and take your cue from their response. Taking the harness or leash from the handler can disorient and confuse the team. If you believe someone is in a dangerous situation voice your concern in a calm manner, but do not push, pull or grab the person.
5. Speak to the person, not the dog! Some Guide Dog handlers may allow petting, but always ask first. Many folks enjoy introducing their dogs, but if they decline, please respect their wishes.
6. Sometimes a Guide Dog will make a mistake, and a correction is necessary to keep up the training. This could be a verbal reprimand or a leash correction. Handlers have been taught the proper and humane training techniques to maintain their dogs' working standards. You may not always hear it, but Guide Dogs get loads of praise when they do the right things.
7. You can expect to see Guide Dog teams just about anywhere. They are granted the right of access everywhere the public is allowed. They are allowed into restaurants, offices, churches, hospitals and hotels. They travel on buses, in taxis and airplanes, shop at grocery stores, enjoy amusement parks, movies and concerts.

When you meet a person who is blind:

1. Introduce yourself when entering a room, and let the person know when you are leaving. Say the person's name, if you know it, so he or she realizes you are speaking to them.
2. If you are leaving a blind person alone in an unfamiliar area, give him or her a point of reference, verbally or tacitly, such as a counter, wall or piece of furniture.
3. When speaking to a blind person, make an effort to be verbally descriptive. Instead of saying "over there" or "this way", try to give a more detailed picture of things, such as "thirty paces in front of you" or "turn right where the carpet ends".
4. When offering sighted assistance to people who are blind, it is easier to let them hold on to you. Don't hold on to them, but offer your elbow or arm so they can follow where you lead.
5. Don't be concerned about saying things like "see you later", or "looking good". These are part of our verbal culture -- blind people use these common phrases too.
6. People who are blind are just like you and me. Treat them with friendliness and consideration, and speak directly to them, not to the people they may be with.