

Sight Loss Friendly Church: **Practical Guiding Tips**



from TORCH TRUST

Useful tips to help guide someone with sight loss

- Remember to ask first if someone needs help.
- Introduce yourself by name, say who you are.
- If you know their name, refer to the person by name so they know you are talking to them.



Many people will be used to being guided by holding an arm. Others may wish to be guided by putting a hand on your shoulder or just by following you closely. If the person wishes to take your arm, stand next to them and allow them to put their hand in the crook of your elbow. This means that when you walk, the person will be slightly behind you, so remember to take your time and keep at their pace.

- Check which side the person you are guiding would like you to stand.
- Allow the person time to take your arm securely before you move.
- Keep your guiding arm still and as relaxed as possible.
- Match the pace of the person you are guiding.
- Allow enough room around any obstacles and tell them what you are approaching.
- It's also good to say there is a change in ground surface or a step.
- Explain any loud noises that might occur.
- Bear in mind that older people or people with other disabilities may need additional considerations.

If the person who you are guiding has a guide dog, approach them from the side away from the dog. Never take hold of the dog's lead or harness as the owner needs to be in control. If you are unsure, just ask the person you are helping and they will tell you what they want you to do.



Single file walking

- Tell the person you are guiding that you are approaching an area where you need to walk in single file.
- Move your guiding arm to the middle of your back.
- The person you are guiding will step in behind you.
- If there is a guide dog, they will drop the harness and allow the dog to walk behind them on the lead.
- When you can walk side by side again, simply bring your arm back to the side of you.

Kerbs and roads

- Inform the person you are guiding that you are approaching a kerb, and let them know whether it is a 'kerb up' or a 'kerb down'.
- Say when you start to move again and allow time for the person to step up or down with you.

Steps, stairs and slopes

- Tell the person you are guiding that you are approaching steps or a slope and whether they go up or down.
- If there is a hand rail, they should be on the side of the rail if possible.
- Handrails normally run with the stairs, and any landings there may be, so letting the person you are guiding hold on to the rail will generally make it easier for them.
- If you are shorter than the person you are guiding, any arm movements may not be as pronounced, so make sure that you take the first step on the same side as your guiding arm.

Stepping up

- As you go up steps, the person you are guiding will feel the movement of your arm as you step upwards.
- They will then start to step up.
- Remember that they will in effect be a step behind you.
- When you reach the top, tell them and allow them time to find their footing and resume their position next to you.



Stepping down

- Always a little more difficult, but the same process as stepping up – walk one step ahead and tell them when you have reached the bottom.

Doorways

- Try to go through the doorway with the person you are guiding on the hinge side, and tell them in which direction the door opens.
- As you go through the door, you will be slightly in front of the person you are guiding.
- They can place their hand on the door to help them know when they are through the doorway.

Seating

- Tell the person what type of chair they will be sitting on and guide them to it.
- Try not to back them into the seat.
- Ask them to remove their hand from your guiding arm and place their hand on the chair. Tell them if you have placed their hand on the arm or back of the chair.
- If the chair is positioned under a table, make sure to tell them.
- If the chair is on wheels, again tell them and hold the back of the chair to stop it from moving as they sit.

Rows of seats

- More often than not, the person you are guiding will prefer to be led into the row of seats.
- For this you may need to side step, so make sure that you take your time.
- Guide them so that they are standing centrally in front of their seat and they will be able to sit down.
- When leaving the row, let them know when you have left the row and are in the aisle.

Cars

Tell the person you are guiding what car they are getting into. If they are entering an MPV or a minibus, the height and step into the car will be different from a normal car.

- Explain which direction the car is facing and put your guiding hand on the car door handle. This enables the person to slide their grip down your arm to find the door handle, and then using their other hand to find the top of the car door.
- They can then position themselves and get into the car.
- You could open the car door first, but you must tell the person that you have done this for them.
- If you do this, place your guiding hand on the roof of the car so they can position themselves.
- If they are leaving the car, leave the car first and open the door and guide them out.

Buses, coaches and trains

Transport varies so much in terms of access, doors and floor levels, so this can sometimes be a little tricky. Just go back to the basic rules, and ensure that you tell the person where you are, if there are any gaps, if the steps are high, etc.

- You should go first and lead the person.
- Walk in single file along aisles and use your guiding hand to show where any rails and backs of seats are.



Photos from a 'fun filled' interactive workshop at our holiday centre with volunteers



Guiding children

A child with a sight problem can be guided in the same way as an adult. Just remember not to grab a child's hand, still ask their permission. If they choose to hold your arm, they might not be tall enough to link their hand into the crook of your elbow, so you may just want to put your arm where they can reach. Or they may be more comfortable for you to hold them by their wrist instead of their arm.