

The

Be Helpful

Guide

Learn how to make getting around easier for people with sight loss, from people with sight loss

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Hey!

If you're reading this, it means you want to know how to offer some support to blind and partially sighted people when you're out and about.

So a few of us have created this guide, because we know that approaching a stranger can be a bit... well, awkward.

In here you'll find lots of vital tips that should make you more comfortable and confident, so you can do your bit to make sure everyone can get around easily.

Part one

Recognising

It's not always easy to know if someone has sight loss.
But a lot of the time, there are some good indicators...

Guide Cane

You've probably seen someone with a **guide cane** on your travels.

As you might know, it helps people with sight loss find obstacles and identify ways to get around, like steps or pavement edges.



Guide dog

Or of course, you might see someone with a **guide dog.**

We know they're cute, but it's really important that you don't distract them. If they're wearing a harness, it means they're working. And no-one likes being interrupted at work. Even dogs.



Other indicators include:



Someone holding a shorter cane while walking (this is called a symbol cane)



Someone holding their phone close to their face



Or wearing dark glasses if they're sensitive to light

Did you know?

93%

of blind or partially sighted people can see something, like shapes or colours.



Part two

Asking

It's not easy to make the first move. Everyone knows that. But when it comes to offering some support, it's really as simple as just asking...

Why it's important

Asking is important, because the person may not actually need help.

And even if you get the okay, always check what kind of help is needed instead of just grabbing an arm. They might just want the bus number, not to do the foxtrot with you.



Let's break it down:



Say hello and **introduce yourself** – a bit of chat makes it less awkward.



Ask if the person would like some help, and what you can do, like help them find the bus door. Don't be offended if you get a 'no thanks'!



If someone **wants to be guided**, ask how they'd like it to happen and follow their lead. Please don't touch or grab their arm without asking – it can be quite unsettling!

Tips for asking

Asking isn't as awkward as you might think. Try this:

'Hey, do you need some help crossing the road?'

or

'Shall I read out the bus number for you?'



A quick story

**“I wish guides would
ask me how best to help”**

“When I have been guided poorly as a deaf-blind woman it usually revolves around speed through a crowded environment without any explanation from my guide. It feels like being dragged through a washing machine on the tumble cycle, shadows loom into view unexpectedly close, my hearing aids are swamped with noises it’s so confusing and stressful. I wish guides would ask me first how best to help.”

– Jane

Part three

Guiding

So, you've asked if you can help, and you've had the okay to start guiding. It's all good so far. Now, here are a few bits of advice during the actual guiding bit...

Top tips for guiding:



Tell someone about any potential hazards in front of them and say where they are, or guide them around.



Same with kerbs and steps – let the person know they're there. Oh, and don't forget to say whether the steps go up or down. That's important.



If you're helping someone into a seat, ask if you can place their hand on the back of the seat before they sit down, so they can get their bearings.



When you get to the destination, explain where things are so they know what to do next. And please, please – say goodbye when you're leaving so they don't keep talking to you. Not a great look.



Remember this

If you're giving directions, try to avoid phrases like 'over there'. Sounds obvious, but it happens more than you think. Best to be specific – 'walk forward', 'turn left' – or use a clockface, like 'the bar is at your 2 o'clock'.

A quick story

**“He never asked
what I needed”**

“A well-meaning taxi driver unexpectedly grabbed my arm as I stepped out of his cab, and then pushed me towards the entrance of the hospital. But then he let go midway through and disappeared. I was lost, and annoyed that he never asked what help I needed.”

– Dave

Part four

Out and about

watch-outs

When we're on our travels, there are certain things that can be a pain in the you-know-what. Here's what you need to know:

Bus stops

It's never good when you get on the wrong bus is it? The bus number can be really hard to see, so if someone's looking a bit unsure, you could always ask if they'd like you to confirm which bus it is, or help with finding the door.



Supermarkets

Sometimes, the essentials get moved around, making things a bit complicated. So if you see someone with sight loss inspecting a product, or looking a bit unsure while reading the information on it, ask if you could clarify anything.



Spaces without kerbs

When there isn't a clear kerb between pedestrians and vehicles, it can be really confusing. Someone might end up walking in the road or the cycling lane. So if you see that, ask if you can guide them back to safety.



Part five

Lead the way

every day

If you want to be helpful for blind and partially sighted people, there are lots of things you could do to make our streets more inclusive...

Prevent obstacle dodging

- Bin day can be a bit of a nightmare. So always try to keep yours off the pavement if you can.
- Avoid parking your car on the pavement, or leaving an e-bike or scooter there. They aren't just obstacles, they're potentially really painful ones.
- Trim back any overhanging shrubs or trees you might have in your front garden. White canes stay on the floor, so we won't know anything's up there.
- If you see a faulty crossing, unmarked holes in the ground, or anything else that could be a hazard on the pavement, report it to your local council.



Be bright on your bike

- Make yourself as visible as possible when you're cycling. That means wearing high-vis clothes and using your lights.
- Use your voice to let people know you're coming. Ringing a bell can be confusing, as someone with sight loss won't be sure what to do to get out of the way.
- Not to get all 'highway code' on you, but remember to give pedestrians space, especially if you notice someone has sight loss.



No off-roading on scooter

- If you're on a scooter, stick to the roads and cycle paths. And again, if you're about to overtake a pedestrian, give plenty of space and use your voice to let them know you're coming, especially in tight areas.



Thanks so much

The fact that you've taken an interest means a lot. Because the more people that know this stuff, the more inclusive everyday life will be.

So tell a friend. Tell a neighbour (while moving their bin). Share the web address below to make sure everyone has the confidence to make sure people with sight loss can be safer and more independent.

rnib.org.uk/BeHelpfulGuide