

Guide Dogs

What guide dogs do

Guide dogs help people who are blind or visually impaired move around safely, and often transform their lives. They are usually allowed anywhere that the public can go, even where other dogs aren't allowed. In order to help their owner, guide dogs must know how to:

- keep a steady pace
- stop at all kerbs
- recognise and avoid obstacles
- stop at the bottom and top of stairs
- lie quietly when their owner is sitting down
- help their owner to board public transport
- obey spoken commands
- ignore distractions such as other animals and people.

Guide dogs and their owners

Guide dogs must also know not to obey any command that would put their owner in danger. This is called selective disobedience and is perhaps the most amazing thing about guide dogs: they know when to obey their owner and when they should *disobey* to keep their owner safe.

Selective disobedience is extremely important at road crossings, where the owner and dog must work very closely together to cross safely. When they reach the kerb, the dog stops and signals to the owner that they have reached a crossing. Dogs cannot recognise the colour of traffic lights, so the owner must decide when it is safe to cross the road. The owner listens to the flow of traffic to judge when the light has changed and then gives the command 'forward'. If there is no danger, the dog crosses the road. If there are cars coming, the dog waits until they pass and then crosses.

The guide dog doesn't know where they are going, so it must follow the owner's instructions. The owner can't see obstacles so the guide dog must help the owner to avoid them. The owner is like the navigator on an aircraft who must know how to get from one place to another, and the dog is the pilot who gets them there safely.

How guide dogs are trained

Not all dogs are suited to the life of a guide dog. Puppies born to be guide dogs have to be intelligent and good-natured; it is important that they aren't nervous of crowds or frightened by sudden noises.

When it is eight weeks old, the puppy sets out on its journey to become a life-changing guide dog. It goes to live with a volunteer 'puppy-walker', who teaches the pup to follow simple commands and to walk on a lead. The puppy-walker also takes it to busy town centres and on different kinds of public transport. The puppy is introduced to the sights, sounds and smells of a world in which it will play such an important part.

When the puppy is about a year old, it returns to the guide dog centre for the next part of its training. It can be hard for puppy-walkers to say goodbye to a puppy, but they have the satisfaction of knowing they have helped to raise a dog who will one day be someone's eyes.

Work and play



Guide dogs work hard and there is no room for fun during the working day. If you see a guide dog, you should leave it alone so that it can concentrate on helping its owner.

At the end of the day, however, a guide dog will play just like an ordinary pet.

"Before I got my guide dog, Benji, I spent most of my time at home. Now I'm out and about almost every day. He has given me confidence: now I can catch a bus into town, meet my friends and go shopping. I can go anywhere I want, without thinking twice."

Guide dog owner Lucy, talking about her guide dog.

Did you know?

- The first guide dogs in the UK were trained in 1931 by Rosamund Bond and Muriel Crooke.
- There are now 4,500 guide dog owners in this country.
- The working life of a guide dog is 6 – 7 years.
- The lifetime cost of a guide dog is £50,000.

Play your part!

If you sponsor a gorgeous little guide dog puppy, you play an important part in its amazing journey. It costs from only £1.00 a week and you get regular 'pupdates' with photos as it grows up and news of all its adventures!

