



**Access to food premises for
guide dog owners and other
blind and partially sighted people**



Introduction

This leaflet provides information and guidance for owners, managers and staff of restaurants, cafes etc on the accessibility requirements of guide dog owners and other blind and partially sighted people; and their legal duties in relation to this.

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (Guide Dogs) aims to enhance the mobility, independence and quality of life of blind and partially sighted people by providing guide dogs and other services.

Guide dogs are working animals, not pets, and their owners rely on them for both independence and mobility. Guide dogs have up to two years of intensive training and receive further training throughout their working lives. In addition, guide dog owners are given training on how to maintain the extremely high standards of grooming which the dogs require and the dogs are checked regularly by vets.

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Royal Environmental Health Institute Scotland have confirmed that guide dogs and other assistance dogs should be allowed entry to restaurants, food shops and other food premises as their very special training means that they are unlikely to be a risk to hygiene in these premises.

In practical terms, guide dogs do not disrupt the everyday operation of businesses or premises. They are trained to sit at their owner's feet at all times, not to bother other people and not to climb on furniture.

What the law says

Disabled people including guide dog owners and other blind or partially sighted people have important rights under the Equality Act 2010, or Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland. The Equality Act 2010 consolidates and replaces previous discrimination legislation including the Disability Discrimination Act in England, Wales and Scotland.

The Equality Act and DDA in Northern Ireland provides for blind and partially sighted people to have the same right to services such as restaurants, pubs and cafes as everyone else.

It includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people can access services. This includes amending a 'no dogs' policy to allow guide dogs and other assistance dogs.

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- Reading out the menu for customers who are blind or partially sighted or providing menus in large print or Braille.
- Providing a seating area for a guide dog owner with sufficient room for the dog to lie under the table as it has been trained to do. However, a guide dog owner should not be placed in a lower standard area than any other customer.

- Providing a sighted guide and assistance with a buffet meal.
- In self-service restaurants, staff should offer assistance.
- Offering help with the bill and paying, giving change, etc.
- Being aware that additional time, effort and skills are sometimes needed when providing services to blind and partially sighted people.

Religious considerations

Religious grounds cannot be used to exclude guide dog and assistance dog owners:

Religious or cultural beliefs can raise sensitive issues relating to dogs. However, the Equality and Human Rights Commission successfully reached agreement on this with a number of religious groups including the Muslim Shariat Council. (see 'Know Your Rights! Assistance Dog Owners' DRC, 2003). Guide Dogs staff can also advise on this.

Making general provision for blind and partially sighted people within the restaurant

To make your premises more accessible to blind and partially sighted people:

- Choose décor with good colour contrast and lighting.
- Make sure that all the circulation routes are free of hazards, e.g. planters, freestanding wine coolers.
- Ensure that glazed walls and doors are highlighted appropriately.
- Provide audible alarms and systems.
- Display good signage which is legible. The signs should have contrasting features i.e. good contrast between the text and its background, in the recommended size and font. (See 'Sign Design Guide' in 'Useful publication' section). They should also contrast clearly with the surroundings in which they are positioned.
- Provide information in alternative formats for customers, e.g. Braille and large print menus. If this is not possible, for instance a 'specials menu' which changes daily, staff should offer to read the menu.

Additional provision and assistance for guide dog owners and their dogs:

- Change policy and practice to amend a 'no-dogs' policy to allow for assistance dogs.
- Never distract or harass the dog. Check with the owner before any contact is to be made.
- Never feed the dog. Guide dogs are working animals and are fed a strict diet at regular times; any additional food may cause the dog to be sick or adversely affect its health in other ways.
- Provide a water bowl for the dog.

- In seating areas ensure there is sufficient space for a guide dog under a table or in a corner so that it can remain with its owner.

How to communicate with blind and partially sighted people and provide sighted guidance

- Ensure a good level of staff awareness, which could be addressed through disability awareness training for all current and new staff.
- Staff should know how to meet and greet a person who is blind or partially sighted and have some knowledge of how to guide a person who requires sighted guidance.
- When addressing a blind or partially sighted person with a guide dog, speak to the person, not the dog, and tell them who you are and what your role is in the restaurant.
- Ask the blind or partially sighted person what assistance is needed rather than making assumptions as to what might be required.
- If the blind or partially sighted person asks to be guided to another part of the restaurant, stand by the person's side and allow them to take hold of your arm/ elbow in order to guide them along. Do not take hold of them and drag or push them in a particular direction. When guiding a blind or partially sighted person through a building or outdoors, it is important to tell the person where they are going and what obstacles or hazards might be approaching. They need to be told in advance about doors opening towards or away from them and about steps, kerbs or slopes going up or down, which will allow them time to adjust to their surroundings. This should prevent accident and injury.
- When guiding a person with a guide dog, stand by the person's right-hand side (usually the guide dog will be on the left) and adopt the same procedure as above. Never take hold of the dog's lead or harness and, if the owner tells the dog to do something, do not interfere as this may confuse the guide dog.
- Good communication is vital for all customers but even more so for blind and partially sighted people. Where possible information should be provided in the requested format, so that blind and partially sighted customers are not excluded.

This information booklet is purely for guidance purposes. Guide Dogs can only provide informal mediation between service providers and guide dog owners. Legal advice can be sought from the EHRC, RNIB or other specialist legal services.

List of useful contacts

Equality and Human Rights Commission Disability Helpline

Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

England

Telephone: **0845 604 6610**

Textphone: **0845 604 6620**

Fax: **0845 604 6630**

Wales

0845 604 8810 - Wales main number

0845 604 8820 - Wales textphone

0845 604 8830 - Wales fax

Scotland

0845 604 5510 - Scotland Main

0845 604 5520 - Scotland Textphone

0141 228 5912 - Scotland – Fax

Northern Ireland (Equality Commission)

Telephone: **028 90 500600**

Textphone: **028 90 500589**

www.equalityni.org

Royal National Institute of the Blind RNIB

RNIB Legal Rights Services

Tel: **0303 123 9999**

Email: LegalRights@rnib.org.uk

RNIB Helpline

Tel: **0303 123 9999**

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

www.rnib.org.uk

Useful publications

'Equality Act 2010 Services, public functions and associations: Statutory Code of Practice' (EHRC, 2011)

'Know Your Rights! Assistance Dog Owners' (DRC SP8, January 2003)

'Bringing the DDA to life in small shops: improving access to goods and services for disabled businesses and other small service providers' (DRC – Making rights a reality, 2004)

'Bringing the DDA to life in small shops: improving access to goods and services for disabled customers – café case study' (DRC – Making rights a reality, 2004)

'Making access to goods and services easier for disabled customers: a practical guide for small businesses and other small service providers' (DRC – Making rights a reality, 2004)

'What do guest accommodation owners need to know?' (DRC – Making rights a reality, 2004)

'Sign Design Guide: a guide to inclusive signage' JMU Access Partnership, RNIB and the Sign Design Society) available from RNIB.

Contact details for Guide Dogs

For further information, please contact Guide Dogs
Tel 0845 241 2178

Guide Dogs

Hillfields
Burghfield Common
Reading
RG7 3YG

Tel: **0118 983 5555**
Fax: **0118 983 5433**

The advice in this information booklet relates to restaurants and cafés. Many hotels have restaurants. Separate information on access to hotels can be obtained from Guide Dogs Mobility Teams.

The information given in this document was correct at the time of printing. This document provides basic information and is not a substitute for legal advice.

The information provided in this booklet about access for guide dogs and their owners, also applies to other registered assistance dogs.

Contact details for assistance dog organisations

Assistance Dogs (UK)

C/o Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
The Grange
Wycombe Road
Saunderton
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9NS

Tel: **01844 348 100**
Fax: **01844 348 101**

Canine Partners

Mill Lane
Heyshott
Midhurst
West Sussex
GU29 0ED

Tel: **08456 580 480**

Fax: **08456 580 481**

Email: **info@caninepartners.co.uk**

www.caninepartners.co.uk

Dogs for the Disabled

The Frances Hay Centre
Blacklocks Hill
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX17 2BS

Tel: **08700 776 600**

Fax: **08700 776 601**

Email: **info@dogsthedisabled.org**

www.dogsthedisabled.org

Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

The Grange
Wycombe Road
Saunderton
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9NS

Tel: **01844 348 100**

Fax: **01844 348 101**

Email: **info@hearingdogs.org.uk**

www.hearing-dogs.co.uk

Support Dogs

21, Jessops Riverside
Brightside Lane
Sheffield
S9 2RX

Tel: **0870 609 3476**

Fax: **0114 261 7555**

Email: **supportdogs@btconnect.com**

www.support-dogs.org.uk

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and electronic formats.

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