



**Welcoming  
customers  
with sight loss**



Customers with a vision impairment represent a significant and active segment of the retail and hospitality market.

With this guidance, your business can get ready to help customers who are blind and partially sighted enjoy and use your space. In turn, they're more likely to return and remain loyal to your brand.

**The “purple pound” or spending power of disabled people and their households is currently estimated to be around £446 billion a year.**

# ‘Hello, how can I help you?’

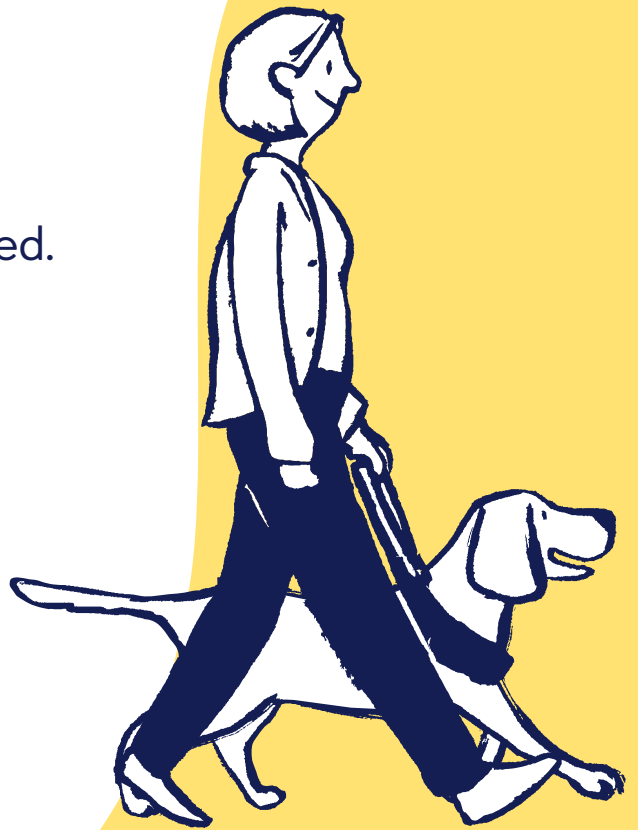
“

We end up going where we’re celebrated, not where we’re tolerated.

”

Person with sight loss.

Not every customer with a vision impairment will use a cane, wear dark glasses or be accompanied by a guide dog or other assistance dog. If you spot a customer who looks hesitant or uncertain, or is moving cautiously, a simple “Hello, how can I help you?” is an easy way to start a conversation and find out if a customer needs assistance.



# ‘Directly in front of you at 12 o’clock’

Blind or partially sighted people may need to be accompanied in order to shop or find a seat in a café or restaurant. They may also need some extra assistance from staff to find and purchase what they’re looking for, or to enjoy your hospitality.

# General Tips



**Use normal body language.** This will positively affect your tone of voice and provide extra information to the person. Don't be afraid to use everyday language and do remember to ask how you can best help.



**Always speak directly to the vision impaired person.**  
Never channel conversation through a third person.



**Consider their preferences when you're guiding them.**  
Ask them if they'd like you to walk ahead of them, behind or on their left or right. Their preference may allow them to use any remaining vision.



**Always let the person know about differences in the floor surface** such as steps, and any obstacles near them that could be trip hazards or they could accidentally bump into.



**You may wish to use the 'clock face technique'** when describing the environment in front of the person - e.g. 'directly in front of you at 12 o'clock is the main entrance'.



**Provide clear instructions** when describing a route or when you'd like the person to change direction e.g. Left and Right.



**Do offer to describe an item or read labels,** sometimes this may be the only help that a person needs.



**Always let them know when you're leaving** the conversation or room.

“  
About three staff members walked past me in a coffee shop and one of them even said hello to the dog but ignored me. I walked out in the end.  
”

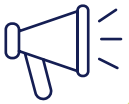
Guide dog owner.



# 'Can I help with the menu?'



Cafes and restaurants can sometimes be tricky to navigate for people with a vision impairment, but a few simple steps can ensure a positive experience.



**Communication is key;** as always, say hello and ask how you can help.



**Describe the layout of the venue,** ask if the customer has a preference of seating and explain how ordering works.



**Offer to read the menu** and let the customer know if the menu is available in other formats such as digitally, in large print or Braille. Ask if there is any specific assistance you can give.



**When bringing food and drinks to the table, always say what you are putting down and where it is.** Once again the 'clock face technique' can be useful in describing where drinks, cutlery and condiments are located.



If self-service, **offer to accompany the customer** and describe what is available. They may also need some assistance to carry their choice back to a table.



**Offer to guide your customers to the facilities** if they need them. Remember to describe the interior and let them know you will wait outside to guide them back.

# 'How will you be paying?'

Finding the till or using a card machine can sometimes be difficult for someone with a vision impairment and operating a self-checkout can be almost impossible.



**Offer to take the customer to the till** and explain the process.



**Let the customer know the total price** and ask them how they'd like to pay.



**If paying by cash, confirm the amount the customer has given you and count out any change.**



**If paying by card or phone the customer may need guidance to locate the machine**, and to help customers enter a pin the number 5 is often indicated by a tactile dot. You can guide a person gently by the wrist to locate the machine and dot but **always ask permission first**. Let the customer know when payment has gone through.

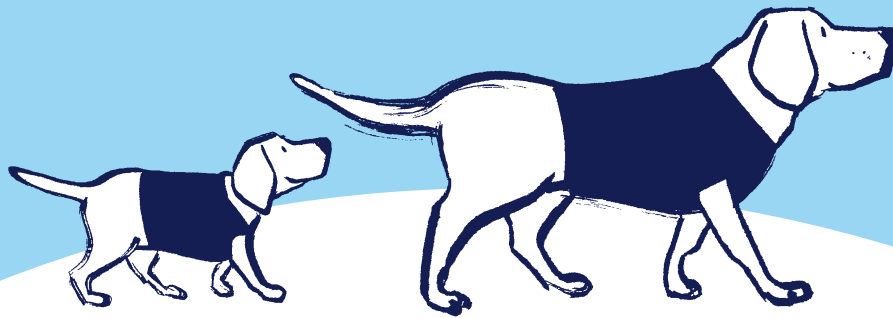


**Always offer to support the customer at self-checkout machines and other touch- screen devices**, as they can be inaccessible for people with a vision impairment. Alternatively, offer to open a manual till or checkout.



# ‘How was everything for you today?’

Finally, consider asking how the experience was for them or if there is anything that could have been done differently. If there is, this could not only benefit you, but also the next customer with sight loss for whom you help.



## Guide Dogs and Assistance Dogs

Whilst placing a “Guide and Assistance Dogs welcome” sticker in a window is a great start, providing a truly positive customer experience for guide and other assistance dog owners involves so much more.

Guide dog and other assistance dog owners often choose large, well-known service providers because they believe their needs will have been anticipated.

By writing a clear policy and planning ahead, you can support your staff in providing outstanding experiences for guide and other assistance dog owners time and again.

If you would like more information on the access rights of assistance dog owners you can find this via

[AccessTeam@GuideDogs.org.uk](mailto:AccessTeam@GuideDogs.org.uk)

[www.assistedogs.org.uk](http://www.assistedogs.org.uk)

[Assistance dogs: a guide for all businesses | EHRC](#)

# Sighted Guiding Training

Sighted guiding training can teach you how to guide people with a vision impairment safely and respectfully. A useful life skill, it'll give you the skills and confidence to approach and offer assistance to a customer who is blind or partially sighted.

Visit [Sighted Guide Training](#) | [Guide Dogs UK](#) or email: [partners@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:partners@guidedogs.org.uk) to find out more.

