

# Guide Dogs

What Are They, What Do They Do, and What Are Some Barriers Experienced By Guide Dog Users?

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# Who Am I and Who is My Guide Dog?

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# What is a Guide Dog

- A guide dog is a type of service dog under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Service animals are defined as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.
- Examples of such work or tasks include:
  - Guiding people who are blind
  - Alerting people who are deaf
  - Pulling a wheelchair
  - Alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure
  - Reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications
  - Calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack
  - Performing other duties.

## What is a Guide Dog (Continued)

- Service animals are working animals, not pets.
- The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person's disability.
- Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.  
(<https://www.ada.gov/resources/service-animals-2010-requirements/#top>)

# Guide Dog Training Programs

- Approximately fifteen guide dog programs in the United States.
- International schools
- International Guide Dog Federation provides training standards for guide dogs worldwide

# Stages of a Guide Dogs Life

- Stage 1: First Weeks
- Stage 2: Puppy Raising <https://seeingeeye.org/puppy-raising/> .
- Stage 3: Training
- Stage 4: Career
- Stage 5: Adoption (retirement) by user or another person

# What is Training Like for a Guide Dog User

- Apply for guide dog
  - Online application.
  - Share pertinent medical information, including how far you can walk and physical limitations.
  - Includes visit from school to see pace and lifestyle of person
  - May need recommendation from an orientation and mobility specialist)
  - Person must be able to travel independently without a guide dog
- Person is accepted to program
- Training with a guide dog may occur in a residential program or in-home



# What is Training Like for a Guide Dog User (Continued)

- Training lasts from 14-28 days depending on program and whether person is a first-time guide dog user or being trained for a successor dog
  - Different programs use different training methods
  - After a person completes training program, they graduate and continue to work the guide dog
- Person may have follow-up services during guide dog's working life
- Retirement: when person and school decide it is time for guide dog to retire, dog may be adopted to another person or stay with the person who worked the dog

# What Do You Do at the Guide Dog School?

- Typical schedule in residential program:
  - 5:30am: park and feed
  - 7:00am: breakfast
  - Free until morning trip
  - 8:00am – Noon: morning trip and 11:30am park
  - Noon: lunch
  - 1:00pm – 5:00pm: afternoon trip and 4:30pm park and feed
  - 5:00pm: dinner
  - Lecture or free until 8:00pm
  - 8:00pm park time
  - Free until next morning.
- Home Training: schedule developed by student and instructor

## What Does a Guide Dog do for Guide Dog Users?

- Knows commands (left, right, forward, and rest)
- Follows a line of travel (sidewalk or hallway)
- Stops at steps or obstacles (curbs, top of escalator)
- Identifies steps, escalators and elevators upon verbal command
- “Intelligent disobedience”

## What Does a Guide Dog do for Guide Dog Users (Continued)?

- Learns to identify empty seats in busses, light rail, public places
- May learn to take person back to their seat in a restaurant
- Lays on the floor when on train or airplane traveling in a car
- Finds the counter in a coffee shop or store
- Learns to work through revolving doors

## What Does a Guide Dog do for Guide Dog Users (Continued)?

- May learn to find a trash can, ram to light rail platform, stairs to a specific entrance
- Learns appropriate behavior (don't bark in public places, focus on work, sleep under desk or in bed in office, sleep under table or chair during meeting)
- Does not read traffic lights – blind person must have orientation and mobility training in order to apply to a training program to get a guide dog
- Watches for moving cars in streets and driveways
- Works in crowds (Time Square in New York)
- Maintains a line of travel on roads where there are no sidewalks

# What Does a Guide Dog do in the Workplace?

- Harness is like work clothes. When dog is wearing its harness, it acts like a professional. It is working
- Sleep under desk in an office
- Sleep under chair or table during meetings
- Don't bark inappropriately

## What Does a Guide Dog do at Home?

- Once the harness comes off, a guide dog is just a dog
- Guide dogs learn not to jump on people who come to the door.
- Guide dogs learn not to counter-surf
- Guide dogs learn not to sleep on furniture
- Guide dog user must maintain training

# Barriers Faced by Guide Dog Users

- People petting or making contact with Guide Dog. Even making eye contact with a dog can distract it from its work.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regulations effective August 1, 2024. The CDC regulation requires all dog handlers, including people with service animals, to complete a CDC Dog Import Form upon entering or returning to the U.S. with a dog.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/importation/dogs/dog-import-form.instructions.html#:~:text=CDC%20Dog%20Import%20Form,-Form%3A>
- Inaccessible Department of Transportation forms. Since December 2020, the Department of Transportation (DOT) Guidelines for traveling on airplanes permits airlines to require people with service dogs to fill out documentation within a specified number of days before we fly.
  - As of January 4, 2024 — Airlines that require the DOT service animal forms must make the forms available to passengers on their website in an accessible format.
  - The forms are not always accessible by people who are blind or have low vision so we have to find someone to help us fill them out and sign them.



## Barriers Faced by Guide Dog Users (Continued)

- Airlines enforce DOT regulations differently so passenger does not always know what to do. You have to look at each airline individually when you fly.
- DOT requires service dogs to be under 65 pounds or airlines can ask you to take a different flight. That is difficult since not all guide dogs are under 65 pounds. Person may have to take another flight and does not know until they get to the gate and airline says person cannot board this flight.
- Some airlines are using a third party to validate whether a dog is a legitimate service dog and the third party has incorrectly identified guide dogs as not being legitimate service dogs. They do not have to tell the user why. Third party has misidentified people as not being disabled but we do not know why since they do not have to tell us why.
- Article from Washington Post: <https://wapo.st/47SOjSM>

# Barriers Faced by Guide Dog Users (Continued)

- Law enforcement personnel do not know the law or unwilling to enforce it
- Confusion in businesses and housing about difference between guide dogs, service dogs, and emotional support dogs (denials by restaurants or rideshare drivers because guide dogs wear a harness instead of a vest, or a bad experience with another dog)
- Attacks on guide dogs or interference with guide dogs
  - Interference with the work of guide dogs in public: a survey
  - <https://seeingeeye.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/interference-with-the-work-of.pdf>
- Rideshare denials
- Sales of service dog equipment online makes it easy for anyone to put a vest on their dog and say it is a service dog
- On Facebook you can easily find an entity that will certify your dog as a service dog in three easy steps

# Legal Protections

- Americans with Disabilities Act
- California Penal Code section 365.5
- California Penal Code section 365.6
- California Penal Code section 365.7
- California Civil Code 54.2

# What Can Businesses Ask About a Guide Dog?

- When it is not obvious what service a dog provides, a business or staff can ask two questions:
  - Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
  - What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

# What Are the Responsibilities of the Guide Dog User?

- Keep the guide dog healthy
- Take it to vet appropriately
- Relieve the guide dog regularly so it does not have accidents
- Keep the guide dog from eating food it should not eat so it relieves appropriately
- Feed the guide dog on a schedule to help it relieve on a regular schedule
- Groom it to reduce shedding
- Correct the guide dog immediately when it behaves inappropriately (timing is everything)
- Praise the guide dog for good work
- Practice obedience
- Teach family and other people how to behave around the guide dog

Questions