

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

Access to hotels for guide dog owners



Moving forward together



Guide Dogs

Introduction

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.

Guide dogs and other assistance dogs are exempt from the rules that prevent other dogs from accessing restaurants and other areas where food is served:

“Because of their training and skills the Institute of Environmental Health Officers has stated that assistance dogs are exempt from the usual hygiene rules that apply to dogs, including those that relate to areas where food is being served.” (SP8, DRC 2003)

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 climb on furniture and not to bother other people.

The Disability Discrimination Act and duties on service providers

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) provides legislation to protect the rights of disabled people.

Part 3 of the DDA places duties on all service providers, including owners and operators of hotels, not to discriminate against disabled people and to make reasonable adjustments to their services and premises to enable disabled people to access them.

These duties were introduced in three stages and apply to service providers of all sizes:

- Since December 1996, it has been unlawful for service providers to refuse to serve a disabled person, offer a lower standard of service or provide a service on worse terms to a disabled person for a reason related to his or her disability.
- Since October 1999, service providers have had to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people in the way they provide their services.
- Since October 2004, service providers have had to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access.

Hotel staff should not refuse to serve a disabled person or provide them with a lower standard of service because of their disability. Staff may also need to make reasonable changes to the way in which they provide their services to make sure that they do not discriminate against a disabled customer.



It is illegal to refuse to accept a booking for a disabled person for a reason relating to their disability. This means that a guide dog owner who makes a booking at a hotel with his/her guide dog should not be refused accommodation due to the fact that they are blind or partially-sighted, or that they have a guide dog with them. It is the service provider's (i.e. the hotelier's) responsibility to provide the same level of service to disabled people that they would provide to other members of the public, and to make any necessary reasonable adjustments in order to be able to do so.

Reasonable adjustments under Part 3 of the DDA

'Reasonable adjustments' is a phrase used within law to give some flexibility and allow different solutions in different situations. Reasonable adjustments may vary according to the:

- Type of service provided;
- Nature of the service provider and its size and resources;
- Effect of the disability on the individual.

Some hoteliers may be concerned about upsetting other customers who may be allergic to dogs. However, management procedures can be put in place to ensure that customers who have an allergy to dogs are not allocated accommodation that has previously been used by guide dog owners.

Another example of reasonable adjustment could be to allocate designated rooms for guide dog owners close to an exit, giving easy access for the guide dog to an area where it can 'spend' (relieve itself). For more information, see the section on 'Additional provision and assistance for guide dog owners and their dogs'.

Religious considerations

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

"Religious or cultural beliefs have often been cited as a reason for non-admittance of assistance dogs in restaurants and other premises. However, it should be noted that there is a legal requirement to permit access to assistance dogs and such beliefs are not a defence against non-compliance.

However, this is a sensitive aspect of the access issue and tact should be used by all involved. The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has been successful in reaching agreement on this issue with a number of religious groups including the Muslim Shariat Council. The DRC has also worked with a number of businesses to successfully resolve problems that have arisen out of uncertainty about this issue." (SP8, DRC 2003)

Emergency evacuation

Current legislation and standards state that all people should be evacuated if there is a fire. There is no document which states that disabled people should be left in a

building to wait for the fire service to rescue or assist them. It is the responsibility of the management to ensure their safe escape by introducing suitable escape plans. Emergency evacuation procedures should include:

- Training staff to deal with emergency procedures.
- Identifying customers with a disability/visual impairment.
- Explaining the emergency procedure to guests on arrival, preferably making the information available in alternative formats.
- Ensuring an escape strategy is in place in your hotel.
- Making sure the staff on duty are aware of the number of people who would require assistance and their location/room number.
- Ensuring all fire exits are clearly signed and free of obstruction (internally and externally).

For more information see 'Means of Escape for Disabled People' (in 'Useful publication' section).

Making general provision for visually-impaired people within the hotel

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 or umbrella stands.
- Ensure that glazed walls and doors have been 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 publications' 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 hotel guides and menus.

Additional provision and assistance for guide dog owners and their dogs

- Change policy and practice to amend a 'no-dogs' policy to allow 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.



- The guide dog will require an area to relieve itself in on a regular basis, i.e. a 'spending area'. This area should be outside and away from other guests. Ideally, provide an enclosed concrete or grass surface area from which the dog cannot escape if it is allowed off the lead to relieve itself. If this is not available, the owner and dog should be escorted to an appropriate place and the dog can remain on the lead.
- The designated 'spending area' should be free from litter, glass and other potentially harmful articles. In addition, the pathway to this area should be safe and free from hazards.
- The designated area should be cleaned regularly.

Remember that a guide dog owner is no different from any other guest of the hotel. They should be treated with the same level of hospitality and courtesy afforded to all customers.

How to communicate with visually-impaired 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 visually-impaired and have some knowledge of how to guide a person who requires sighted guidance.
- When addressing a visually-impaired person with a guide dog, speak to the person, not the dog, and tell them who you are and what your position is in the hotel.
- Ask the visually-impaired person what assistance is needed rather than making assumptions as to what might be required.
- If the visually-impaired person asks to be guided to another part of the hotel, 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.
- It is helpful, and may also be legally required as a reasonable adjustment, to explain the layout of a hotel to a visually-impaired person and when doing this, remember to ask the person what information might be useful before bombarding them with too much detail. Explain room layouts (bedroom, bathroom, lounge, dining room etc) in a simple way by asking the visually-impaired person to stand with their back against the entrance door and then

talking them through the picture which is now in front of them. For instance: “The bed is against the wall on your left, beside that is a set of small drawers and facing the bed is the television.” They will also need to know which is the hot tap and which the cold. If there are any potentially dangerous items in the room, tell the person where they are and what they are. Items which may cause a trip hazard (cables, rugs etc) should be removed where possible or placed against a wall to minimise risk.

- 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 visually-impaired customers are not excluded.

Examples of some Disability Rights Commission (DRC) legal cases

No room at the inn

Mrs P is a wheelchair user and also uses an assistance dog. Her daughter had booked her a short holiday break in a hotel via the hotel’s website. Mrs P’s daughter then phoned the hotel to inform the staff that her mother would be accompanied by an assistance dog because of her impairment. However, she was informed that the hotel had a ‘no-dogs’ policy.

The DRC contacted the hotel’s head office to reaffirm its policy to allow assistance dogs into its hotels, and advised it on the types of identification the owners of assistance dogs carry. The hotel also agreed to work with the DRC on improving its services to disabled people. Mrs P received a full apology from the hotel and £200 compensation.

Caravan park changes policy on assistance dogs

Mrs K needs to use an assistance dog because she is visually-impaired. When booking a holiday at a caravan park, she requested one of the park’s newest caravans, yet was refused as no pets were allowed in these caravans.

The case was referred to the Disability Conciliation Service and Mrs K received a full apology from the park. The caravan park agreed that a proportion of every type of caravan should be made available for the use of people with assistance dogs. The park also agreed to pass on information about the DDA, so that other caravan parks are aware of their obligations. Further examples of legal cases are available on the DRC website: www.drc-gb.org

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 DRC, RNIB, National Law Centres or other specialist legal services.

List of useful contacts

Equality and Human Rights Commission Disability Helpline

www.equalityhumanrights.com

England

Telephone: 0845 604 6610

Textphone: 0845 604 6620

Fax: 0845 604 6630

Scotland

Telephone: 0845 604 5510

Textphone: 0845 604 5520

Fax: 0141 228 5912

Wales

Telephone: 0845 604 8810

Textphone: 0845 604 8820

Fax: 0845 604 8830

Northern Ireland

Telephone: 028 90 500600

Textphone: 028 90 500589

www.equalityni.org

Royal National Institute of the Blind – RNIB

DDA Legal Information Officer

Telephone: 01733 375 308

Email: DDAEnquiries@rnib.org.uk

RNIB Helpline

Telephone: 0845 766 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Tel: 0207 388 1266

www.rnib.org.uk

Law Centre

National Advice Line

Telephone: 0207 791 9800

Minicom: 0207 791 9801

www.lcf-disabilityrights.org

Useful publications

‘Means of Escape for Disabled People’ (Department for Communities and Local Government, endorsed by Disability Rights Commission, 2007)

‘Fire Evacuation Briefing’ (Disability Rights Commission publication, 06/02/2003)
http://www.drc.org.uk/library/policy/other_issues/fire_evacuation_briefing.aspx

‘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)

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

‘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' local district teams, of which there are 28 across the country. Details can be obtained from www.guidedogs.org.uk or by contacting head office:

Guide Dogs

Hillfields
Burghfield Common
Reading
RG7 3YG

Tel: 0118 983 5555

Fax: 0118 983 5433

Further information is also available from **Guide Dogs' Information and Support Officer on 0845 241 2178.**

The advice in this information booklet relates to hotels. Many hotels have restaurants. Separate information on access to restaurants can be obtained from Guide Dogs' Information and Support Officer. 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@dogsforthedisabled.org
www.dogsforthedisabled.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@hearing-dogs.co.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/

This publication has been published by
The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
(Guide Dogs).

This booklet was produced by the in-house design studio at Guide Dogs.

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The text of this document is available on request in Braille, audio, large print and electronic formats.