

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

## Access to restaurants 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 bother other people and not to climb on furniture.

## The Disability Discrimination Act and duties on service providers

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 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 cafés and restaurants, 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.

Restaurant staff should not refuse to serve a disabled person or provide them with a lower standard of service because of their disability.

This means that a guide dog owner should not be refused service due to the fact that



they are blind or partially-sighted, or that they have a guide dog with them. 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.

## 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.

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- Reading out the menu for customers with a visual impairment or providing menus in large print.
- 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 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)

## Making general provision for visually-impaired 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 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 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 role is in the restaurant.
- 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 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.

## Examples of Disability Rights Commission (DRC) legal cases

### Visually-impaired customer with guide dog refused service in a restaurant (DRC/01/405)

**Summary:** The restaurant operated a 'no-dogs' policy which made it impossible or unreasonably difficult for the client to make use of the service they provided. In addition, despite being aware of the client's disability, the restaurant still refused to allow the client and the guide dog to access their premises, thereby treating the client less favourably for a reason relating to her disability.

**Outcome:** The court decided unlawful discrimination had occurred in this case. The client was awarded damages for injury to feelings and limited costs.

### Restaurant refused to allow guide dog to enter their premises (DRC/01/4471)

**Summary:** The client, who had a visual impairment, booked a table to dine with a friend at a local restaurant. Upon arriving at the restaurant with his friend, the client was rudely informed by the restaurant owner that he could not enter the premises if accompanied by his guide dog, as the restaurant had a 'no-dogs' policy. The client explained to the restaurant owner that he must be accompanied by his guide dog due to his visual impairment. Despite this explanation, the restaurant owner persisted in his refusal. The client eventually left to dine elsewhere, where he was made welcome. In response to a complaint that he had unlawfully discriminated against the client for a reason relating to his disability, the restaurant owner attempted to use his religious beliefs as justification.

**Interest:** The unusual justification defence in this case provides an opportunity to clarify the interaction between rights under the DDA and a service provider's human rights.

**Outcome:** County court proceedings were commenced. The case was settled before a hearing for the sum of £800, which the client donated to a local disability organisation. The restaurant owner changed his 'no-dogs' policy to allow assistance dogs to enter his premises and agreed to advertise the new policy by attaching a notice to the front window of his premises. Further examples of legal cases are available on the DRC website: [www.drc-gb.org](http://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](http://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](http://www.equalityni.org)

### Royal National Institute of the Blind – RNIB

#### DDA Legal Information Officer

**Tel:** 01733 375 308

**Email:** [DDAEnquiries@rnib.org.uk](mailto:DDAEnquiries@rnib.org.uk)

#### RNIB Helpline

**Tel:** 0845 766 9999

**Email:** [helpline@rnib.org.uk](mailto:helpline@rnib.org.uk)

**Tel:** 0207 388 1266

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

#### Law Centre National Advice Line

**Tel:** 0207 791 9800

**Minicom:** 0207 791 9801

[www.lcf-disabilityrights.org](http://www.lcf-disabilityrights.org)

## Useful publications

‘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.



**Guide Dogs**

## 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](http://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 restaurants and cafés. Many hotels have restaurants. Separate information on access to hotels 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

**E-bost:** [info@caninepartners.co.uk](mailto:info@caninepartners.co.uk)

[www.caninepartners.co.uk](http://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](mailto:info@dogsforthedisabled.org)

[www.dogsforthedisabled.org](http://www.dogsforthedisabled.org)

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The Grange  
Wycombe Road  
Saunderton  
Princes Risborough  
Buckinghamshire  
HP27 9NS

**Tel:** 01844 348 100

**Fax:** 01844 348 101

**Email:** [info@hearingdogs.org.uk](mailto:info@hearingdogs.org.uk)

[www.hearing-dogs.co.uk](http://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](mailto:supportdogs@btconnect.com)

[www.support-dogs.org.uk/](http://www.support-dogs.org.uk/)

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**Tel:** 0845 241 2178 (calls are charged at national rates)

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