

A GUIDE DOG IN THE WORKPLACE

When a guide dog owner first comes to work with his or her guide dog, most people are a little uncertain about what they should or shouldn't do.

The reality is that you should barely notice the guide dog is there, since it will have been trained to lie quietly while its owner is working.

However, here are the answers to some of the questions that people ask most often. Following this advice will help to make life easier for everyone.

HOW SHOULD I BEHAVE TOWARDS THE DOG?

The important thing to remember is that a guide dog is a working animal, not an ordinary pet. It expects to work with its owner and knows that when it's wearing the harness, it is on duty. When the dog is working it needs to concentrate on the job in hand (or paw!), so it's very important that you don't distract it by touching, feeding or talking to it. When the dog's harness is off, it should behave like a well-trained pet dog.

WHERE WILL THE DOG STAY DURING THE DAY?

When it's not working, the guide dog should rest quietly and undisturbed. The owner will provide a dog bed or blanket which should be placed in a draught-free position close to their desk or workbench. If the owner's work space is unsuitable for a dog, for example because of industrial machinery, Guide Dogs may be able to help with providing a kennel and run.

CAN I TALK TO THE DOG?

Like all dogs, Guide dogs enjoy attention and unless it's on duty the answer will probably be "yes" – but please always ask the owner first! It's important not to overwhelm or overexcite the dog, particularly when it's settling in to the work environment, so please don't be offended if the owner asks you not to talk to the dog.

CAN I FEED THE DOG?

Definitely not! All guide dogs are fed a carefully balanced diet and extras or titbits will affect their health and the way they work. We also recommend you keep your own food – sandwiches for example – well out of temptation's way!

CAN I PLAY WITH THE DOG?

A guide dog has been trained to lie quietly where it's placed, so it's a great help if you don't encourage it to run around in the workplace. It may have some toys to play with but they should not be noisy ones, and the dog won't be allowed to chase them around the work area.

WHEN DOES THE DOG GO OUT?

For the first few weeks, the owner may need to take the dog out for five minutes to relieve itself three or four times a day. Once the dog has settled in and is used to the routine, one or two longer breaks will normally be enough.

WHERE DOES THE DOG RELIEVE ITSELF?

The guide dog owner, together with their employer and a Guide Dogs instructor will identify the most suitable place nearby, which may be on the premises or off-site. The guide dog owner will take the dog to the relief area.

Arrangements will also have been made for the disposal of waste and cleaning the area, but support from the company or individuals is always much appreciated.

WHO LOOKS AFTER THE DOG?

Caring for the dog is the owner's responsibility. The dog is taken to the vet for a health check every six months and is routinely wormed and vaccinated. The owner grooms the dog regularly to keep it clean and to try to reduce the number of hairs it leaves on the carpet. The dog is fed at home and it is the owner's responsibility to ensure that water is available at work.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE DOG MISBEHAVES?

Applying appropriate discipline is part of a guide dog owner's responsibility. There is no reason for you to put up with disruption caused by the dog misbehaving. If problems do occur, please discuss them with the owner, who will be keen to make sure that his or her dog isn't a nuisance. If the problem isn't resolved, you can contact your nearest Guide Dogs training centre for help and advice. It's always easier for them to deal with things sooner rather than later, so please don't let matters get out of hand before saying something.

DOES SOMEONE CHECK ON THE GUIDE DOG'S WORK?

Each guide dog and owner is visited a least once a year to check the dog's guiding skills and to ensure that all is well. Several visits to the workplace may be necessary in the early settling-in days, and then annually. If difficulties arise a Guide Dog instructor will come more often to offer support and advice.

If you would like to know more about Guide Dogs and the range of services we offer to visually-impaired people, or you are interested in fundraising or volunteering for Guide Dogs, please e mail guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk or contact us at:

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Registered charity: 209617