

**Visual Impairment Services
Highland**

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How to guide a blind person through a door

Approach the door with the blind person on the hinge side. The escort opens the door with the hand of his/her “grip arm”. This movement tells his grip – which way the door is opening. At this stage, she/he can reach along his/her “grip arm” with his/her free hand to open the door.

As they go through the doorway the blind person moves their free arm to the back of the door, grasps the handle and shuts it.

Helping someone in and out of a car

It is not necessary to physically push a blind person into a car. The technique recommended by mobility experts is to put the blind person's hand onto the door handle, tell them which way the car is facing, whether they are to sit in the front or the back and leave them to open the door and protect his/her head by locating the car roof with their free hand before ducking into the seat. Make sure the blind person avoids hurting himself/herself on the sharp corner of the car door.

When a blind person is getting out of a car, do not pull them out. Leave them to get out by themselves but watch out for their head. Give an arm if necessary for support.

Sighted people giving a blind person a helping hand on to a bus or train should remember to tell them where there is an empty seat.

How to Guide a Blind Person

Always let the blind person take the sighted person's arm. Visually handicapped people may accept the fact that sighted people tend to grasp them by the arm and in effect push them along, but they would be better to suggest that they take the guide's arm. That way round it is easier for them to follow, and the guide has a clearer view of where he/she is going and is better able to avoid obstacles. The blind person should hold the guide's arm just above the elbow and take up a position half a pace behind them. The guide should keep his/her arm close to his/her side so that the blind person can feel the movement of his/her body and does not need constant instructions to turn right or left.

The guide's arm which is held by the blind person is known as the "grip arm", and the blind person holds it with their "grip hand".

Don't Push Blind People into Seats

It is frightening for a blind person to be physically pushed down into a chair and bewildered to be told to “sit down” with no indication of where to find the chair. The best way to show a blind person is shown below.

The sighted guide puts the hand of their “grip arm” on the back of the chair. The blind person now slides their “grip hand” down the guide’s arm to locate the chair and check there is nothing on the seat. Feeling the side of the chair with their leg, the blind person can usually sit down unaided. The guide should say if there are any obstacles to avoid on either side of the chair.

Don't say “steps”, say “steps up” or “steps down”

The most common mistake by well meaning sighted people when guiding a blind friend is to say “steps” without mentioning whether they are going up or down. It is best not to say how many steps, as this may lead to confusion. The information is superfluous if the correct guiding position is maintained. This is the same for steps and stairs as on the level, except that the blind is one step behind, and their “grip hand” has to reach that much further. Many blind people find it helpful to hold a banister or a stair-rail, so it may be necessary to switch sides to enable the blind person to do this. Give a warning if the handrail ends before the last step, as many do! Back on the level, the guide should say, “that was the last step”, take one pace, pause a moment until the blind person is also on the level, and then move on.