

Sighted guiding: a brief introduction

What is sighted guiding?

Many people with visual impairments are able to get around independently, perhaps with the assistance of a guide dog or cane. But sometimes, particularly in an unfamiliar or crowded environment, it's good to have some help. Sighted guiding is a technique developed by people with visual impairments where a sighted person helps a person with sight loss to move about safely.



The sighted guiding technique



The person with a visual impairment takes your arm

The person takes your arm just above the elbow, thumb on the outside of the arm. This allows the person to feel and follow your movements. It also means you will be walking half a step ahead – close enough to talk, but first to encounter obstacles. Let the person choose which arm they wish to hold, and keep the arm relaxed and close to your body. Never push or pull the person you're guiding.

Give information and warnings

Tell the person about obstacles and hazards and give information about things like changes in surface. You might want to describe the surroundings, but don't overload with information - or talk so much you can't have a normal conversation!

Moving through narrow or crowded spaces

To negotiate narrow doorways, crowded pavements or other confined spaces, you will sometimes need to walk in single file.

Just slip your guiding arm backwards, towards the small of your back, so the person you're guiding can fall in behind you.



Upstairs downstairs

The most important information is whether the stairs go up or down!

The visually impaired person's free hand should be on the side with the handrail. Pause to allow them to find the first step. You will be one step ahead and should tell the person when you get to the last step.

Taking a seat

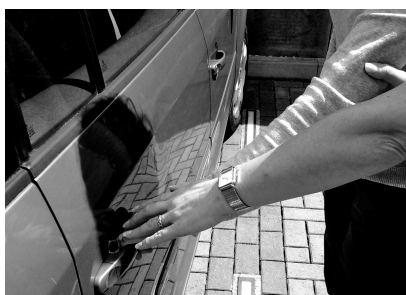
Say what sort of a chair it is (does it have arms? is the seat particularly low? is there a table in front?) and which way it's facing; then put your guiding hand on the chair back. The person you are guiding can then run their free hand down your guiding arm, find the chair, and sit themselves down.

Need to change sides?

On occasion, the person you are guiding may need to move from one side of you to the other. To do this, they simply side-step behind you and take your other arm. You can help by bending your free arm and putting it behind your back, so it's easy to locate.

Doorways

Tell the person that you are coming to a door and whether it opens towards or away from you. Ideally, the person you are guiding should be on the hinge side. You open the door with your free hand and transfer it to your guide hand; then the person with the visual impairment can take over with their free hand, holding the door open and closing it behind you both.



Travelling by car

Tell the person which way the car is facing. Put your guide hand to the handle so that the person with the visual impairment can take it with their free hand and open the car door. They can now feel the space and get themselves in. It's a good idea to put your hand above the open door, so they won't hit their head. Some people may need help with the seatbelt.

Leaving the person you are guiding

Many people with a visual impairment will feel uncomfortable if left 'in thin air' and prefer being in contact with a solid object, such as a wall to lean on. You may have noticed that the methods described here, such as helping the person to a seat and to change sides, never leave them with nothing to hold on to. If you have, for example, helped someone in the street to cross a road, briefly describe the surroundings and tell them which way they are facing before you leave.

To sum up

What are the two most important principles in sighted guiding?

- 1) The person with a visual impairment takes your arm (not the other way round).
- 2) Communication is more important than technique!

If you want to find out more about sighted guiding, there is lots of information online, including videos on YouTube. If you are likely to be a sighted guide and would like someone at OAB to go over the technique and give you a bit of practice, please get in touch.



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