

GUIDE
DOGS



Access to hotels for guide dogs owners

and other blind and partially sighted people

Contents

Introduction	3
What the law says	4
Reasonable adjustments	4
Religious considerations	5
Making general provision for blind and partially sighted people within the hotel	5
Additional provision and assistance for guide dog owners and their dogs	6
How to communicate with blind and partially sighted people and provide sighted guidance	7
Emergency evacuation	8
Useful publications	9
Contact details for assistance dog organisations	10
Contact details for Guide Dogs	10

This document provides information relating to access for guide dog owners to hotels, bed and breakfasts, etc.

It sets out the legislative duties that owners and staff have under the Equality Act 2010 which specifically requires entry to these premises for guide dogs (and other assistance dogs). Further, that staff must not treat the guide dog owner less favourably because of their impairment.

It describes that it is not acceptable to refuse entry due to religious or cultural beliefs (a view that is supported by the Muslim Shariat Council).

The document goes on to provide tips and advice for owners, managers and staff on how to make their premises more accessible, how to communicate and assist guide dog owners, and contact details for more information.

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:

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Royal Environmental Health Institute Scotland have confirmed that guide dogs and other assistance dogs should be allowed entry to food premises as their very special training means that they are unlikely to be a risk to hygiene in these premises.

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.

What the law says

Disabled people including guide dog owners and other blind or partially sighted people have important rights under the Equality Act 2010, or Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 in Northern Ireland (as extended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 (DDO)). The Equality Act 2010 consolidates and replaces previous discrimination legislation including the Disability Discrimination Act in England, Wales and Scotland.

The Equality Act and DDA in Northern Ireland provides for blind and partially sighted people to have the same right to services such as hotels, and bed and breakfast facilities as everyone else.

Service providers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people can access services. This includes amending a 'no dogs' policy to allow guide dogs and other assistance dogs. 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. It is unacceptable and could be seen as discriminating to charge a guide dog owner extra or charge for cleaning as their dog is an essential mobility aid.

Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustment examples:

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 can raise sensitive issues relating to dogs. However, the Equality and Human Rights Commission successfully reached agreement on this with a number of religious groups including the Muslim Shariat Council. "The Muslim Shariat Council have clarified that Muslims should accept assistance dogs in their businesses." (EHRC, 2013)

Making general provision for blind and partially sighted people within the hotel

To make your premises more accessible to blind and partially sighted people

- Choose décor with good colour and tonal 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, and the text should be clear and large enough to be read. The signs should also contrast clearly with the surroundings in which they are positioned. It is useful for information signs to have tactile embossed text and Braille. (See 'Sign Design Guide' in 'Useful publications' section for advice on font and text size; and the use of tactile text and Braille).
- 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 blind and partially sighted 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 blind or partially sighted and have some knowledge of how to guide a person who requires sighted guidance.
- Introduce yourself and say what your role is in the hotel. When addressing a blind or partially sighted person with a guide dog, speak to the person, not the dog.
- Ask the blind or partially sighted person what assistance is needed rather than making assumptions as to what might be required.
- If the blind or partially sighted 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 blind or partially sighted 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 blind or partially sighted 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 blind and partially sighted customers are not excluded.

Websites and internet services

If you provide services or take bookings through the internet ensure that your website, emails and e-newsletters are accessible to all customers. This will include, for example, people with visual impairments who use text-to-speech software.

Emergency evacuation

Current legislation and standards state that all people should be evacuated if there is a fire. It is the responsibility of the management to ensure their safe escape by introducing suitable escape plans.

Emergency evacuation procedures should include:

- Ensure all fire exits are clearly signed and free of obstruction (internally and externally).
- Ensure an escape strategy is in place in your facility.
- Where possible, explain the emergency procedure to blind and partially sighted visitors on arrival, and make the information available in alternative formats.
- Train staff to deal with emergency procedures.

This information booklet is purely for guidance purposes. Guide Dogs can only provide informal mediation between service providers and guide dog owners. Please tell your local Guide Dogs mobility team when you encounter an access refusal so we can advise you on next steps to take.

Useful publications

'Equality Act 2010 Services, public functions and associations: Statutory Code of Practice' (EHRC, 2011)

'Assistance dogs – A guide for all businesses'

(EHRC, 2013)

www.equalityhumanrights.com/publication/assistance-dogs-guide-all-businesses

'What equality law means for your business'

(EHRC, 2011)

www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/EqualityAct/service_providers_business.pdf

Guidance for Businesses 'Your role as a service provider under the Equality Act'

(EHRC)

www.equalityhumanrights.com/publications/guidance-currently-being-updated

Guidance for Service Users: 'Your rights to equality from businesses providing goods, facilities or services to the public'

(EHRC)

www.equalityhumanrights.com/publications/guidance-currently-being-updated

'Advice for Tourism Businesses'

(Tourism for All, 2015)

www.tourismforall.org.uk/Advice-for-Tourism-Businesses.html

'Sign Design Guide: A guide to inclusive signage'

(JMU Access Partnership, RNIB and the Sign Design Society)

available from RNIB.

Do you have paying guests? Information on complying with fire safety law for people who provide sleeping accommodation

(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008)

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/11085/payingguests.pdf

Fire safety risk assessment: means of escape for disabled people

(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-means-of-escape-for-disabled-people

Fire safety risk assessment: sleeping accommodation

(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-sleeping-accommodation

Access to food premises for guide dog owners and other blind and partially sighted people

(Guide Dogs, 2015)

'Guidance on the provision of spending facilities for assistance dogs'

(Guide Dogs, 2015)

Information on allergies and fear of dogs

(Guide Dogs, 2015)

Contact details for assistance dog organisations

Assistance Dogs

The information provided in this booklet about access for guide dogs and their owners, also applies to other registered assistance dogs.

Assistance Dogs (UK),
C/o Hearing Dogs for Deaf People,
The Grange, Wycombe Road,
Saunderton, Princes Risborough,
Buckinghamshire, HP27 9NS

Telephone: 01844 348 100

Fax: 01844 348 101

Website: www.assistancedogs.org.uk

Assistance Dogs UK Member Organisations

The seven registered charities that form Assistance Dogs (UK) are:

- Guide Dogs
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
- Dogs for the Disabled
- Canine Partners
- Support Dogs
- Dog A.I.D
- Medical Detection Dogs

Information and contact details for individual organisations available from Assistance Dogs UK www.assistancedogs.org.uk/member-organisations

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Contact details for Guide Dogs

For further information, please contact Guide Dogs

Guide Dogs,
Hillfields, Burghfield Common,
Reading, RG7 3YG.

Telephone: 0118 983 5555

Fax: 0118 983 5433

Email: guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk

Website: www.guidedogs.org.uk/accessallareas



Registered office:

Hillfields, Burghfield Common, Reading RG7 3YG

Website: www.guidedogs.org.uk

Email: guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk

Telephone: 0118 983 5555

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

The advice in this information booklet relates to hotels and bed and breakfast and other accommodation establishments. Many hotels have restaurants.

You could seek additional advice from your nearest Guide Dogs Mobility Team - **www.guidedogs.org.uk/services/guide-dog-services/mobility-teams**

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.

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