

# HOW TO SAFELY GUIDE A PERSON WHO IS VISION IMPAIRED



## Meeting a person with vision impairment

Don't presume to know 'what a vision impaired person looks like'. There are many different eye and neurological conditions that cause vision impairment and not all of these have obvious outward signs.

Don't presume that because someone is vision impaired they can't see you. Only a small percentage of people are totally blind and see nothing at all.

When you greet the person, say who you are. Introduce any other people by name and in reference to their position to the person, for example 'Sarah is to your left'.

Talk directly to the person. There is no need to communicate through a third person. This also applies to people using a Guide Dog - always address the person not the dog.

If the person is accompanied by a Guide Dog, do not pat or distract the dog while it is in harness. A dog in a harness is a working dog.

Be sure to tell the person when you are about to leave so that they are not left talking to themselves.

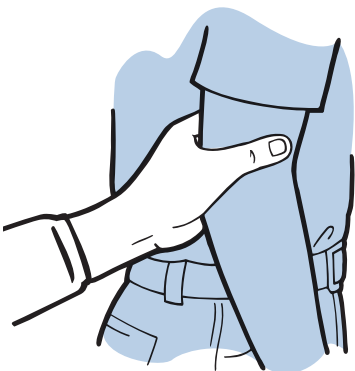
If you leave the person alone, particularly in an unfamiliar environment, never leave them standing in the middle of a room. Ensure that they have contact with an object such as a chair, table or wall.



## *How to safely guide a person who is vision impaired*

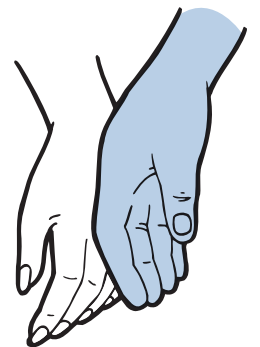
### Establish contact

Ask the person with vision impairment if they need assistance. If they do, make contact by touching the back of your hand against the back of theirs. This is the signal for them to take your arm. If they do not require your assistance, do not feel offended.



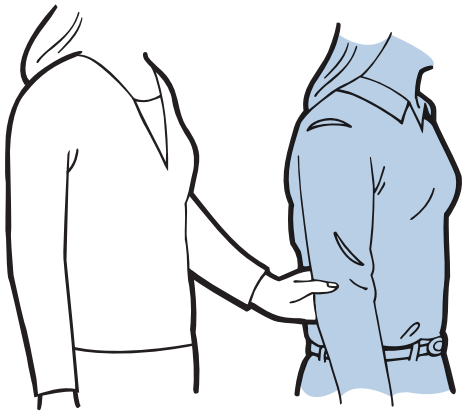
### Grip

Let the person with vision impairment take hold of your arm just above the elbow – with their four fingers on the inside and thumb on the outside of your arm. Their grip should be firm but not tight enough to cause you discomfort.



### Alternative grip

Linking arms may be preferred by elderly people or those with problems balancing. Gripping the wrist may be more comfortable for a child or where there is a substantial height difference.



## Stance

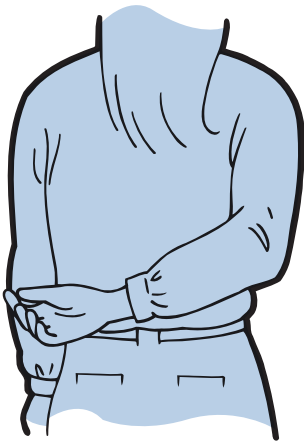
Keep your arm relaxed. The vision impaired person's arm should also be relaxed, bent at about 90 degrees and held close to their side. They should stand beside you, about half a pace behind.

## Walking

As you walk together alert the person with vision impairment to upcoming obstacles such as overhanging branches, change in direction and in the textures underfoot such as the floor being wet or glossy.

## Changing positions

Inform the person with vision impairment that you need to change positions. They will place their free hand on your guiding arm before releasing their original grip and using this hand to locate your other arm. They will then move behind you to the other side and assume the original grip on your other arm.

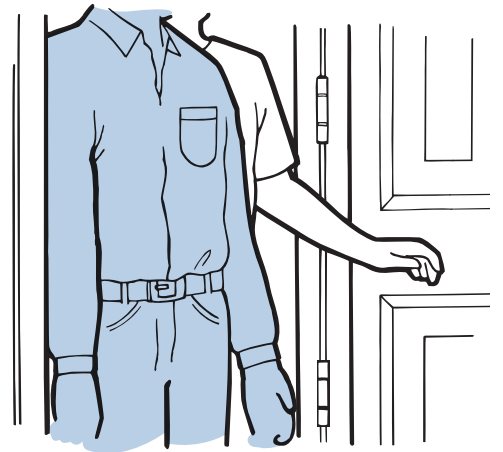


## Narrow passages

Inform the person when approaching narrow passages where it is difficult to walk side by side. Move your arm backwards and position it diagonally across your back. The person will straighten out their arm and step directly behind you. Their arm must remain extended to prevent either of you from tripping over the other's feet. When you have passed through the narrow place, inform the person so that they can assume the original position.

## Doorways

The person with vision impairment must be on the hinge side of the door to ensure smooth and comfortable travel. If they are not on the hinge side, ask them to change sides. Inform them whether it is a push or pull door. Place your hand on the handle and allow the person to move their hand down your arm towards the handle. Open the door and go through first, allowing the person with vision impairment to close the door behind you.





## Stairs and escalators

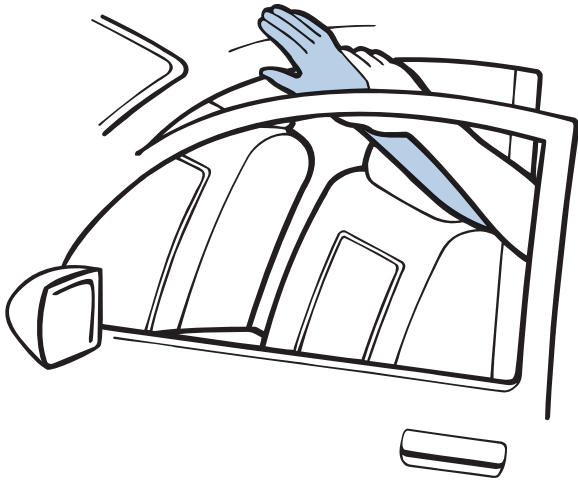
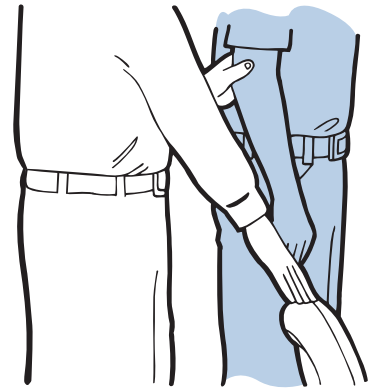
Always approach stairs and escalators from directly in front and pause where they begin.

Inform the person if the stairs or escalators go up or down and let the person switch to the side of the handrail. You will need to be one step ahead of the person on stairs. Both of you will walk together in rhythm.

Let the person know when you have reached the end of the stairs or escalator. At the end of an escalator, tell the person when you are about to step off, for example 'in three seconds'.

## Getting into a chair

Place the vision impaired person's hand on the backrest of the chair and let them know which direction the chair is facing. The person will then use their hands to explore the chair and seat themselves. Remember to lead when you are entering or leaving a row of seats. Never push a person with vision impairment into a seat.



## Getting into a car

Bring the person to the door and inform them about which way the car is facing and whether it is a front or rear door. Place one of their hands on the door handle to enable them to open the door. Place the other hand on the top corner of the door. They can then reach across and locate the roof and remain in contact with it until their head is inside the car. It is easier for the person to sit first and then swing their legs in.

**If you or someone you know is experiencing vision problems please contact Guide Dogs Queensland, we are here to help, Freecall 1800 810 122.**