

Human Guide Technique

There are times when it can be safer or simply more efficient for a person with vision loss to walk with a guide. This can be true when walking in unfamiliar areas, crowded restaurants or dark theaters.

Orientation and Mobility Specialists developed the Human Guide Technique for these situations.

It is best for the person with vision loss and their guide to learn this technique from a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist or a Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist. Eleni Gaves, COMS or Cody Froeter, CVRT at Second Sense can both provide this training.

If that is not possible, here are some basic guidelines you can use to guide someone with vision loss.

- First, make sure the person needs and wants your help. Ask them if they would like assistance.
- If they do want help, introduce yourself. Tell them you are going to touch the back of your hand to theirs. This will allow them to more easily find your arm.
- If the person you are guiding is not familiar with the Human Guide technique, explain how they should hold your arm and where they should stand.
- Ask them where they want to go.

- As you travel, let them know about any obstacles, changes in elevation – such as a curb or set of stairs, or other potential dangers before you reach them. Check over your shoulder to make sure they clear all obstacles safely.
- When you have reached their destination, guide the person to a wall, a chair or other anchor point. Never leave them standing in the middle of an open room or other open area.

Basic Human Guide Techniques

1. The person being guided should grasp the guide's arm just above the elbow, with their thumb on the outside of the arm and their fingers on the inside, nearer to the guide's body. The grip should be firm, but not uncomfortable for the guide. This grip will provide the greatest amount of feedback from the guide's movements.
2. If the person being guided uses a cane or guide dog, they should take the guides arm with their free hand.
3. The person being guided should be positioned to the guide's side and a half step behind. This position will give the guided person time to react to any obstacles. As a guide, you can help to maintain this position by keeping your elbow close to your body.
4. Once you start walking, ask the person being guided if the pace is too fast. Make sure you are walking at a comfortable pace for both of you.

5. If any curbs or steps are in your route, make sure you approach them head-on. This will ensure the guided person knows where to expect the edge of the curb or steps.

Stop when the front of your foot is close to the curb or step. Then, announce whether the curb or stairs go up or down. When both people are ready, step forward just enough to let the guided person find the edge of the curb or stair with their toes. If stairs have a handrail, tell them and position them on the side of the handrail. This way, the guided person may choose to use the handrail.

Steps and stairs can be scary for people with vision loss. Be ready to take it slowly, allowing them time to find each step. It takes practice for the guide and guided to work smoothly as a team.

6. When you are going from a large room to a hallway or coming up to any narrow space, you should alert the guided person of the change. You should move the arm they are holding so your hand is behind your back. They then slide their hand down your arm so they are grasping you at your wrist. Once you leave the narrow space, slowly return your arm to the original position,
7. If you are going through doors, you need to be aware of which side the door opens on and if the door opens toward you or away from you. You want to make sure the guided person is on the same side that the door opens on. The guided person may need to change sides before going through the door. This way you will control the door and block it from hitting the guided person when it closes again. You should also announce which side the door is on and whether it opens in or out to the person you are guiding.