

BEING A SPORT GUIDE

WORKING WITH BLIND, VISUALLY IMPAIRED
OR DEAFBLIND PARTICIPANTS

www.bcblindsports.bc.ca



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BC Blind Sports thanks the many athletes, and their support network of sport guides, classifiers, coaches, officials, volunteers, and families, who we have learned so much from over the years.

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BEING A SPORT GUIDE: Working with Blind, Visually Impaired or Deafblind Participants

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Contents

Introduction / 5

About this Guide / 7

PART 1:

Sport Guide Training Program / 9

PART 2:

Understanding Visual Impairment / 13

PART 3:

What Does a Sport Guide Do? / 17

PART 4:

Communication / 21

PART 5:

Navigation / 25

Resources & References / 33





Introduction

BC Blind Sports and Recreation Association believes that British Columbians who are visually impaired should experience the enjoyment of achieving a healthy active lifestyle through participation in physical activity, physical education, recreation, outdoor pursuits, and sport at their chosen level.

BC Blind Sports works to facilitate participation and encourage skill achievement in physical activity and sport for British Columbians who are:

- blind,
- visually impaired,
- deafblind, or
- blind or visually impaired and have additional disabilities.

In addition to the physical benefits, participation in physical activity can lead to:

- increased independence,
- improved mental health, self-esteem and self-confidence,
- enhanced awareness about local or community services, and
- social connectedness.

By providing educational resources, training and support, BC Blind Sports encourages people of all ages to explore a variety of activities and sports as well as to learn about others' visual impairments.

While some participate purely on a recreational basis, others play at a high level. Competitive athletes participate in local to international events; some even making it to the Paralympic Games.

THANK YOU!

We hope this guide, along with the training, helps explain the value of your role and responsibilities as a sport guide and that you are excited about volunteering. Though it certainly is a big responsibility, it can be an incredibly rewarding experience! Your contribution is integral to introducing and sustaining healthy and active living for people in our communities who are visually impaired.

Please contact BC Blind Sports with any questions anytime. We are here to support you in making your role as a sport guide as successful, enjoyable and fulfilling as possible for the athlete as well as for you.



**A sport guide with
a runner**



About this Guide

This guide has been developed to complement and supplement the Sport Guide Training Program led by BC Blind Sports volunteers and staff. It is important to understand that this resource is not a stand-alone resource and should be used by individuals who have been trained by BC Blind Sports.

All sport guides are subject to screening through an interview process as well as a vulnerable sector Criminal Record Check by policy of BC Blind Sports.

Terms to Note

Athlete: any person who is visually impaired of any age who is participating either recreationally or competitively in any physical activity or sport.

Blind: 10% of the typical level of vision or less.

Deafblind: any person who has a combined loss of both vision and hearing, such that neither of the distance senses of vision and hearing can be used as a primary source of gathering accurate information.

Guide: any person who guides a person who is visually impaired.

“Best I can say is ‘blind’ is just a word... once athletes get out there they are just as good as the sighted.”

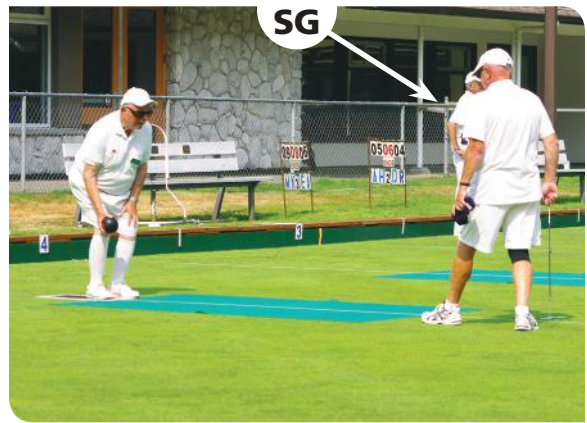
**– JEAN SMYTHE,
LAWN BOWLS**

Sport Guide: any person who guides a person who is visually impaired either on or off the field of play for the purposes of competitive or recreational participation in physical activity or sport.

Visual Acuity: the sharpness of vision or ability to detect detail in what is being looked at.

Visual Field: the amount a person can see in any direction when looking straight ahead.

Visually Impaired: the term most frequently used in sport. It is used throughout this resource to include the full range of legal blindness from total blindness to partial vision, unless otherwise indicated. Other commonly used terms are blind, totally blind, partially sighted, partial vision, or sight impaired.



A sport guide with a bowler

PART 1

Sport Guide Training Program

The Sport Guide Training Program was created in response to a growing need for volunteers who have the skills and knowledge to be confident sport guides both on and off the field of play. In practical terms, the program and this accompanying guide will clearly define the roles and responsibilities of a sport guide and how to effectively relay visual information to an athlete who is visually impaired.

Sport guide volunteers add to the success of program participation for British Columbians who are blind or visually impaired. While a coach or instructor is responsible for guiding the training program, learning, and skill development of the athlete, the sport guide is invaluable in assisting with the transfer of this information to the athlete.

Sport Guide Roles

Opportunities exist in a variety of sports and activities. The following are some of the sports and recreational activities in which people who are blind participate. Also included are brief descriptions of some of the roles the sport guide may play. Note that the role of the sport guide on the field of play in competition is outlined in and governed by the rules for the specific sport. BC Blind Sports or the coach can provide you with more sport specific information as it relates to the athlete.

**“All in all,
it has been a
gratifying
experience for
me and the
athletes I
work with.”**

**– DEAN THOMPSON
LAWN BOWLS**

Athletics (Track and Field): Track – acting as a guide runner according to the rules of the sport. Field – guiding an athlete to and from a throwing circle and orienting them to the circle or line.

Canoe: acting as the sighted person in the boat to assist with skill development, orientation and safety.

Curling: orientation to the rink and describing where the athlete's rock is in relation to the house and other rocks.

Dragon Boating: guiding the athlete to the boat and assisting with location of equipment, and while in the boat describing what is going on, and being available to assist the athlete – including in the case of an overturn or emergency.

Equestrian: giving verbal cues to orient the athlete.

Goalball: a sport designed specifically for athletes who are visually impaired. Goalball is played 3 on 3 on a volleyball sized court with tactile markings and uses a ball with bells so the athletes can hear it. Sport guides assist with training, warm-up, and laying out of the court or other duties.

Golf: orientation to the tee area and green and describing distances, hazards and other items about the course as play occurs.

Ice Hockey: orientation to and around the arena and providing directional and ongoing game play information.

Ice Skating: orientation to and around arena.

Judo: learning movements and positions and orientation to the field of play.



Sport guides, athletes, and coach participating in dragon boat



Athletes practising goalball

Karate: learning movements and positions and orientation to the field of play.

Lawn Bowls: orientation to the mat and green and description of distances of the bowler's ball and the other balls in play.

Power Lifting: learning movements and positions and orientation to the lifting bar in competition.

Sailing: acting as the sighted person in the boat.

Showdown: a table game developed in Vancouver BC for athletes who are blind, using a ball with pellets inside it so the athletes can hear it. Sport guides will be finding the table and assisting with learning the techniques of play.

Skiing (Alpine and Cross-country): skiing with the athlete and providing directional and safety information according to the rules of the sport.

Soccer (known internationally as Football): relaying information from the coach concerning plays, skills and tactics in recreational play or in competition. The sport guide role may be played by the coach as well as a sighted goalie.

Swimming: for very low vision athletes, two sport guides are needed, one at each end of the pool called tappers. They tap the athlete with a long pole to indicate they are coming into the wall and should turn or prepare to touch to finish the race. For open water swimming the sport guide swims along-side the athlete.

Tandem Cycling: the sport guide (called a pilot), rides on the front of the bike, steering, controlling and providing information to the stoker (blind athlete on the back of the tandem).



A participant practising showdown



A sport guide with an athlete cross-country skiing

Triathlon: swimming along with the swimmer, acting as a tandem pilot during the cycling portion, and acting as a guide runner during the running portion.

Walking: guiding the participant using the common guiding techniques (p. 25).

Wrestling: learning movements and positions and orientation to the field of play.

Community “learn-to” lessons, fitness classes, and weight rooms: assisting with orientation to activities, movements, and equipment, and relaying information from an instructor or coach as necessary.

PART 2

Understanding Visual Impairment

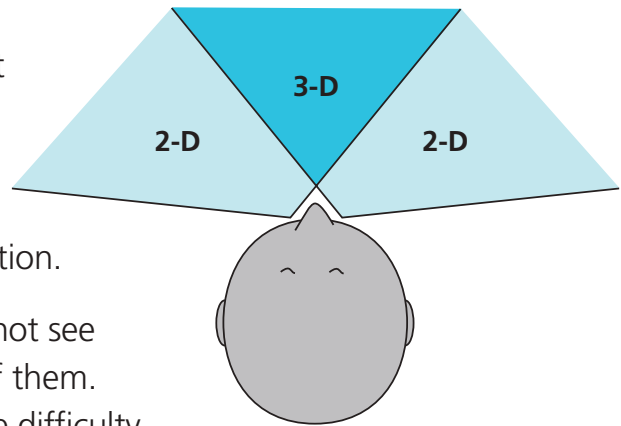
People with a typical field of vision have central vision as well as peripheral vision. Everyone's vision – whether visually impaired or not – changes and fluctuates with everyday life for a variety of reasons including: fatigue, stress, blood sugar level, nutrition, allergies, etc. These fluctuations may be more pronounced in person with a visual impairment.

Central vision: Central vision (looking straight ahead) has an area which overlaps and from which information is provided to the brain from both eyes. This overlap provides three dimensional (3D) vision, creating depth perception.

People who have little or no central vision cannot see clearly or cannot see what is directly in front of them. They may then rely on peripheral vision or have difficulty with depth perception or seeing fine details. The typical test for central vision is the eye chart which measures visual acuity.

To simulate lack of central vision, place a shaded or blacked-out circle right in the centre of each lens on a pair of glasses.

Peripheral vision: People with little or no peripheral vision may be able to see objects directly in front of them (sometimes well), but their peripheral vision (at the sides) is limited. People with limited peripheral vision may have difficulty detecting motion and seeing things at the side of their visual field.



To approximate lack of peripheral vision, take a pair of glasses and black out everything except for a small dot the size of a pencil eraser in the middle of each lens.

Note that vision impairment manifests itself in a variety of ways. Each person is unique and you will learn techniques to best assist the specific athlete with which you are working.



A sport guide assisting a dragon boat paddler into the boat

Classification of Visual Impairment in Sport

Although every athlete who is visually impaired sees differently, there are broad classifications of visual impairment used in sport that can be helpful to know as a sport guide. These classifications have technical definitions and are called sport classes. The sport classes are standardized across sports but often are given different names in different sports. The descriptions below refer to what athletes can see out of their best eye with their best corrected vision (use of prescription glasses or contact lenses if any). Classification systems will soon be changing to be more sport specific. Information on these changes and on classification systems is available from BC Blind Sports.

B1 – These athletes have no or very little vision, no or extremely low visual acuity, and may or may not be able to tell if there is light present (light perception). Athletes at the high end of the B1 class might be able to recognize the shadow of a hand, but would not be able to count the fingers on that hand. These athletes have no functional vision for purposes of physical activity participation.

B2 – These athletes have the ability to recognize the shape of a hand. The level of vision is generally up to 5% or 6% of typical vision.

B3 – These athletes generally can have a level of vision up to 10% of typical vision.

To summarize, an athlete in the B1 sport class will need more assistance both on and off the field of play than someone in the B3 sport class.

Supporting the Athlete

Vision impairment differs from person to person and even those athletes with the same visual impairment can have very different visual experiences and gain very different information from the vision they have. Factors such as the type of eye condition and the age at which the condition presents itself contribute to how vision is affected.

People with the same type of visual impairment can see quite differently in various lighting conditions (natural or artificial lighting, daytime or night time, a bright or cloudy, day, etc.). Understanding what the athletes can or cannot see under specific conditions helps in identifying what information assists them in being safely oriented in their environment on and off the field of play.

Asking general questions such as whether they see better when it is bright or dark out, which colours are easier to see on which background, and whether they see better from the front or one side helps you to be a better sport guide. It is best to avoid asking why they are visually impaired or what their vision impairment condition or cause is, since it is a highly personal (and potentially sensitive) matter and generally will not provide you with any useful information as a sport guide.



**Participants swimming
at camp**



PART 3

What Does a Sport Guide Do?

As a sport guide, you are making it possible for someone who is visually impaired to take part in an activity they otherwise may not be able to meaningfully participate in and enjoy.

If you have never guided before, you may find the first few times stressful. Not to worry! As with anything else, the more you guide, the more confident you will feel. Please communicate with the athlete you are working with and ask questions about how best to help.

Your Role As a Sport Guide

Sport guides assist visually impaired athletes by translating visual information into a format the athletes can understand, as well as providing assistance for safe orientation both on and off the field of play.

On the field of play includes any location where physical activity or competition takes place. It includes venues such as recreation and community centres, track and field and sporting facilities, lawn bowling greens, swimming pools, ski hills, roads, on the water (for boating or paddle sports), etc.

Off the field of play includes any location that does not involve physical activity or competition.

**“I enjoy
the positive
attitude change
when athletes
start realizing
they can play
a competitive
sport, sometimes
for the first time.**

**– DJ BURNS
LAWN BOWLS**

Sport guides may:

- assist with training and competition in a sports-specific manner.
- assist with travel for competitions (p. 19).
- navigate the athletes on and off the field of play (p. 25).
- describe the location of general objects such as benches, stairs, and door numbers.
- describe sport-specific visual information (e.g., “Your paddle is just beside your right foot” or “in this weight room, all of the free weights are on racks along the wall to your left when you enter the room and all the treadmills are along the wall to your right.”)
- assist with training in various facilities. In a weight room, you might help them safely get from one machine to another or set the proper weight for a specific exercise. While running, you might run beside the athlete and assist with staying safely on the trail or sidewalk.
- explain or demonstrate (through physical contact or a wooden doll – p. 24) a specific movement to facilitate understanding (e.g., translating information from a coach or instructor, “When you jump up, you need to swing your arms straight up over your head, pointing them like an arrow.”)
- provide information not related to the sport (e.g., “The washroom is closed for cleaning” or “There is a coffee shop to the left of the community centre’s front entrance.”)
- relay information about potential hazards, including objects the athlete might trip over or posted warning signs. For example, you might need to explain to the athlete there is a ‘Wet Floor’ sign or that they need to step over a curb to get onto the sidewalk.



A sport guide walking an athlete to the sport venue

Sport guides are not responsible for:

- for teaching proper weight training technique or designing a workout routine. This is done under the direction of a qualified coach or trainer.
- teaching the theoretical information for the use of a white cane or dog guide to safely cross a street.
- taking care of athletes' belongings but might help find a secure location for athletes to store bags.

Travel

When travelling to a destination such as a training centre or a competition, sport guides assist with:

- getting to, checking in at and getting around the departure location or collection point, hotel and/or competition area.
- assisting at meals and team banquets.
- accessing bank machines, public washrooms, restaurants, grocery stores, shops and tourist destinations.
- getting to meeting locations for team updates and event departures.
- guiding athletes while they compete, describing competition results and assisting at medal ceremonies.

Remember to help athletes be as independent as possible, while recognizing they may be in unfamiliar surroundings and therefore have less reference information about where they are than they would have at a familiar location. As a sport guide, you are the athlete's eyes, so you need to be as descriptive as possible to familiarize them with the new surroundings.

Sport guides are not required to help with activities or tasks not related to the event before or after that specific commitment.



A sport guide walking an athlete to the sport venue

Note that when travelling as a sport guide you may be required to assist with off the field of play activities which the athlete cannot do independently because they are in an unfamiliar location. Should you choose, or be asked, to assist the athlete with off the field of play activities not directly related to the program, please check with BC Blind Sports staff about this.

Time Commitment

The time commitment a sport guide is asked to make will vary depending on the activity level and the athlete with which you are working. It could range from an hour or two at a regular practice weekly or more often, to travelling to an event for a half day, a full day, a weekend or longer. Generally, the longer the time commitment is, the more time sport guides will spend assisting the athletes with activities off the field of play. This is because the further away from home athletes travel, the less familiar they are with the surroundings.



Sport guides, athletes, and coach participating in dragon boating

PART 4

Communication

As a sport guide it is important to remember that your role is to facilitate safe participation and support the athlete in their personal goals and endeavours. Although you two should work together as a team, often under the direction of a coach, instructor or trainer, it is important to keep in mind that you are there to provide assistance to the athlete.

Most people learn physical skills by watching someone else demonstrate correct technique or perform the activity on the field of play. For example, although you may not have skated before, you likely know what skating looks like. However, an athlete who is blind may not have the same conceptual understanding because they have never seen someone skate. This can make learning a new skill very challenging. As a sport guide, you communicate/translate (or interpret) the necessary information to increase the athlete's understanding of a skill and how to perform it to their optimal ability.

As with learning anything new, the process may not always be easy. It is important that you remain open to having new experiences and trying new methods. Keep in mind that being physically active is meant to be enjoyable for both you and the athlete.

Whenever possible, choose a low stress environment to work in so there are fewer distractions. For example, choose a spot

"The athletes come with such a positive attitude which helps to improve my outlook on life. They are so appreciative of our time and effort on their behalf."

**– DONN SHERRY,
LAWN BOWLS**

away from traffic and crowds, but in the view of the program instructor, coach or public.

The partnership will work best when both parties actively listen to each other, take the time to clarify unclear information, and are courteous, patient, and open to constructive criticism.

Communication Techniques

Here are ways to successfully communicate with your athlete:

- Greet the athlete and identify yourself as they may not be able to see you (e.g., “Hi Alex, it’s Matt here, how are you doing?” or “Hi, I’m Matt from Team BC. What is your name again?”) You can also lightly touch their arm so the athlete knows they are being addressed. Do this at the beginning of a practice or whenever you have left and come back (e.g., “Hi Kevin, It’s Sally, I’m back from the washroom and Fred is here now too.”)
- Clarify what the person can or cannot see. This will help you to better understand how your assistance can be personalized.
- Speak directly to a person who is visually impaired, not to a sighted companion.
- Use a normal tone of voice when talking to a person who is visually impaired and does not have a hearing problem. It is not necessary to speak to a visually impaired person in a louder than normal voice.
- Ask if (and what) support is required (e.g., “Would you like me to guide you?”) If you are inexperienced as a sport guide, say you are new to this form of assistance and you would appreciate feedback.
- Give clear, verbal directions with instructions and explanations.



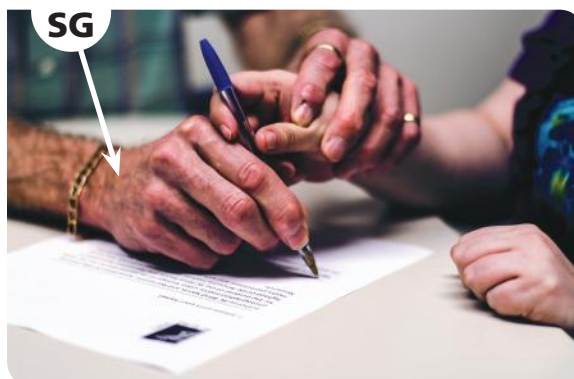
A sport guide introductory handshake

- Ask questions to confirm that the athlete has understood.
- Offer to read signs or documents to the athlete, such as competition results, bus schedules, or menus, and offer to sign relevant forms.
- Inquire as to why the athlete does something a certain way. Be willing to suggest and try new techniques under the direction of a coach or trainer. Talk to others (coach, BC Blind Sports Staff) and discuss any feedback you get with the athlete.



A sport guide reading competition results

- If necessary, calmly tell the athlete about any safety concerns such as hazards or new things in a training environment (e.g., someone has fallen while training or there is a flood in the bathroom.) Try not to raise anxiety or stress levels, as this makes it harder for both of you to react appropriately.



- It is okay to use everyday words such as “look” or “see” when speaking to a person who is visually impaired (e.g., “I’ll look for you at the coffee shop,” or “I’ll see you Friday.”)



A sport guide signing a form with an athlete

- Discretely mention issues such as undone zippers or food stains. If possible, take the person aside or do this quietly, in a manner that does not draw attention.
- Communication about arrangements to meet and for training and practices should be done in a professional manner and through open channels and in accordance with any BC Blind Sports Policy.
- Use discretion with social media and photos in the context of your work as a sport guide and be in accordance with any BC Blind Sports Policy.

Rule of Two

Follow the Rule of Two (adapted from Coaching Association of Canada Responsible Coaching, 2017). The Rule of Two is that you should never be alone or out of sight with an athlete. There needs to be two screened and trained coaches or sport guides with an athlete, especially a minor or vulnerable athlete, when in a potentially vulnerable situation. Examples will be reviewed in the practical training and you are encouraged to contact BC Blind Sports with any questions.

Physical Contact

Physical contact between the sport guide and the athlete can be necessary when guiding and also can be a way to teach physical skills. It is important that this be done in a way that is safe and respectful.

Sport guides wanting to demonstrate a skill by physical contact (touching) should explain to the athlete what they are going to do before touching the athlete and should get the athlete's permission to do so. Respectfully discuss with the athlete any time you believe it would be helpful for you to touch them, or them to touch you. Tell them how you believe this will help facilitate their understanding of the activity. Athletes and sport guides should feel comfortable at all times and the athlete must know they can ask for clarification or can ask the instructor to stop at any time if they are not comfortable.

Methods other than physical contact – such as a jointed wooden artist's doll – can also be used.

Please contact BC Blind Sports if you have any questions or concerns.



**A wooden doll
can assist a sport
guide to demonstrate
body movements or
positions**

PART 5

Navigation

Once you understand how to guide a person who is visually impaired off the field of play, you will find it is not that difficult to adapt the skills used in general guiding to respond to sport-specific guiding situations. Each sport has circumstances that require specific guiding techniques and these will not be explained in the manual. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any BC Blind Sports' staff. They are always happy to assist in developing the skills and confidence of sport guide volunteers.

Sport guides play an important role in the safety of athletes who are visually impaired. When you take a break, or must leave for personal reasons, explain to the athlete why and for how long you will be gone. Make sure the athlete is in a safe place before you leave. It is your responsibility to find someone else to act as a sport guide for the athlete. A sport guide who leaves a visually impaired athlete alone, especially for extended periods of time, creates the possibility for the athlete to encounter potentially dangerous situations, particularly if s/he is in an unfamiliar setting and may not know how to get to safety.

**"...not only
was it an
opportunity to
assist some
extraordinary
individuals, but
you also get
to witness
some terrific
bowling!"**

**– JEANNE JACOBSEN
LAWN BOWLS**

Giving Directions

Be very specific when providing directions (e.g., “There is a bench just outside the main doors about two steps to the left,” or “Turn left at the next corner and it’s the second door on the right. You will hear the sounds of a radio coming from the open door.”) Specific directions are much more helpful than vague ones like “it’s over there,” or “keep going left.”

Reference landmarks when giving directions, especially if the landmarks have an audible aspect (e.g., “You’ll go past a hotel with a big fountain outside and then you’ll cross a street at an audible pedestrian crosswalk.”)

When describing distances, use easily understandable terms rather than vague descriptions. “It’s about 50 metres from here in a straight line,” is much more helpful than “it’s just around the corner.”



**A sport guide and athletes
dryland training for
dragon boating**

Common Guiding Technique

Following is the most commonly used techniques for moving around, navigating stairs, doors and curbs, sitting, and using mobility aids. These will also be covered in the practical training.



**Common Guiding Technique
– Proper Position**

PROPER POSITION

- Ask if the athlete would like you to guide her/him. If so, ask which arm is preferred for guiding and adjust yourself accordingly. You can indicate that you are ready by saying “take my elbow” or lightly touching your elbow to her/his forearm and saying “ready to go?”

- The athlete faces the same direction the guide faces when holding their arm. The physical relationship between the sport guide and the athlete is such that the athlete can accurately follow the guide's movement in a roughly parallel position, following half a step back.
- The key to proper guiding technique is to ensure the athlete's elbow forms a right angle. If you are guiding someone who is a lot shorter than you, such as a child, they may need to grasp your wrist to achieve the proper angle for comfortable guiding. Someone who is exceptionally tall might need to grasp your upper arm.

MOVING AROUND

Once you are in the correct position, you can start moving to different locations. Here are some general tips:

- Move at a pace that is comfortable for the athlete. You may need to adjust your pace to better suit theirs.
- Do things as consistently as possible, such as meeting in the same location or taking the same route to the weight room.
- Let the athlete know when you are coming to a curb or stairs and whether you will be stepping up or down.
- Alert the athlete to upcoming changes in terrain, such as stepping from concrete to grass or gravel.
- Let the athlete know if furniture or their personal belongings have been moved.
- Let the athlete know you are leaving and, if possible, ensure they are in contact with an object such as a wall, table or chair for a reference point.



**Common Guiding Technique –
Proper Position**

- Avoid pulling the athlete by the arm, tugging at sleeves or trying to hold onto their cane or the leash/harness of the dog guide.

REVERSING DIRECTION

Reversing directions while guiding is actually quite simple. You simply stop, turn, and re-establish the proper guiding position before you continue.

CHANGING SIDES

Sometimes an athlete will need to change to a guide's other arm to negotiate an obstacle, such as a door or to get on a bus. There are two techniques for this: grip technique and trailing technique.

Grip technique: Both the guide and the athlete come to a full stop. The athlete places the back of the free hand just above their grip on the guide's elbow. The athlete then moves the original grip hand across the guide's back to the guide's other arm while sidestepping into the proper position on the guide's other side. Once the athlete has made firm contact with the guide's elbow on the new side, the pair can continue.

Trailing technique: The athlete brushes the back of their free hand just above the original grip hand with fingers pointed towards the guide's opposite arm. The athlete then turns 90 degrees and slides the back of their hand across the guide's back until the guide's opposite arm is gripped and the athlete is back in the correct position for guiding.

CROWDED SPACES

Some narrow passageways, such as a hallway, bus, airplane aisle or crowded room may not allow for you and an athlete to walk side by side. In these situations, you will non-verbally



A sport guide with an athlete in narrow passageways or through a door

indicate a narrow space by placing the wrist of your guiding arm in the small of your back. The athlete should then slide their grip down to your wrist before stepping diagonally backward and extending that arm so they are walking in a follow position, one full step directly behind you. This wider spacing minimizes the potential of stepping or tripping on heels. If needed, the athlete can place their non-guiding hand to the guide's back to maintain a single file position.

If the athlete you are guiding is very tall or has a very long stride, you can also extend your guiding arm back away from the small of your back. Though uncomfortable, it will allow for the appropriate space for an athlete with a longer stride to be effectively guided.

In any of these guiding techniques, it is advisable to slow down the pace until such time the proper guiding position can be re-established.

DOORS

Doors are not unlike guiding in narrow passageways. To help avoid mishaps such as pinching of fingers, make sure the athlete makes contact with the middle of the door and not its edges.

Your movements to open a door can sometimes be enough for an athlete to determine if the door is a push or pull door and which side the door opens. However, verbal cues such as "push the door away from you on your right" will also help.

When approaching a pull door, you will need to stop farther back than normal to avoid backing into the athlete.

STAIRS

Tell the athlete when the two of you are approaching a set of stairs and whether you will be moving up or down. Because most stairs are



A sport guide opening a door with an athlete

of a standard size, stating that you are going either upstairs or downstairs will likely be sufficient. Explain if the stairs differ from standard stairs, are spiral (curved), uneven, or have a non-standard run (width) or rise (height).

Approach stairs face on (not at an angle) and come to a full stop directly in front of the first stair. You should be close to the edge of the stairs, but not so close that either of your toes are over the edge of a descending step or under the edge of an ascending step. This will put the athlete in the best position to move up or down the stairs.

If there is a handrail, ask if the athlete would like to use it. If so, transfer them onto the handrail. The guide should walk in front if the athlete is using the railing.

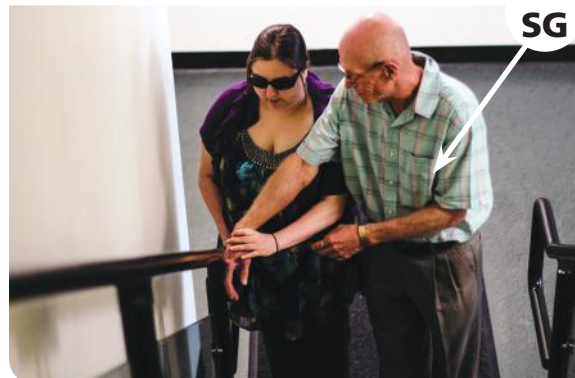
Some athletes will be comfortable not using a handrail. If guiding down the stairs, get in a good position, then have the athlete wait for you to take the first step before moving in tandem. The athlete should be one step behind you at all times.

When you reach the top or bottom of the stairs, you should immediately say, "Last step," and pause before continuing. Once you and the athlete are on the same level, resume your usual guiding position.

As the guide, you are responsible for ensuring safe travel. Be aware of and alert the athlete of important details such as changes in stair direction and size, or if the handrail ends before the stairs do.



A sport guide and athlete stair climbing not using a handrail



A sport guide and athlete stair climbing both using a handrail

CURBS

Curbs should be treated as a single step. As with stairs, approach curbs face on and stop just before the edge, indicating whether to step up or down. Like approaches to stairs, the athlete will probe with a foot to confirm the nose or heel of the curb to be in the right position to correctly follow the guide's instructions.

CHAIRS AND SEATING

When guiding an athlete to sit down, guide them close to a seat, but before you put them in contact with the seat, be sure to give a brief description of the room arrangement. Explain as best you can:

The form and function of the chair: Describe the size and shape of the chair. It is important to mention if it is on wheels and if it has armrests. Is it a small round stool or an office chair on wheels? Is it a foldable convention or lawn chair? If the chair can be adjusted, demonstrate how this works to the athlete.

The chair's position: Describe the location of the furniture and people surrounding the chair (e.g., "We are standing to the left of your chair. It is a large formal armchair with armrests. In front of it is a small square coffee table. There is a small square side table directly to the right of your chair with a phone on it and Susan is sitting on the couch across from you.") Remember, you are the eyes of the athlete! The more information you give about the surroundings, the more effective you will be as a guide.

Once you have explained the situation, place the athlete's hand on the back of the chair or on the armrest. The athlete will then get into position to



A sport guide assisting an athlete to a chair

sit down. If the chair does not have a back or armrests, guide them close enough to the chair that their knees or shins gently contact the seat. The athlete will then sit down.

If a dog guide accompanies the athlete, choose a seating location that has enough room for the dog to sit next to the athlete.

MOBILITY AIDS

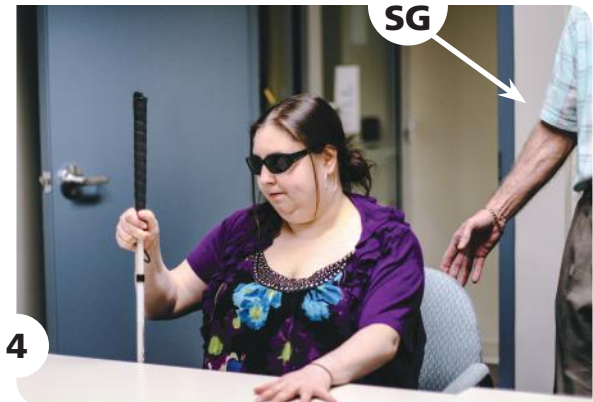
While on the field of play, most athletes will not use any mobility aids. Instead, they will rely solely on their sport guide.

However, off the field of play, some athletes will use a monocular or a white mobility cane to detect objects in their path. Others will carry a white identification cane to alert others of their visual impairment. And others will choose instead to use a dog guide, while some may use nothing at all.

A dog guide is a working dog responsible for safely leading someone who cannot see. Please remember not to distract the dog from doing its job by playing with, petting or feeding it unless the owner gives you permission.

Often despite having mobility aids, athletes who are visually impaired will request your assistance. Guide them as you guide an athlete without a mobility aid, being mindful of their cane or where the dog is positioned.

In some instances, having an athlete use a mobility aid can simplify the process of getting through an area. Explain the situation to the athlete and ask if they would like you to go ahead or if they would like to go first and have you follow.



A sport guide assisting an athlete sit in a chair



Resources & References

Resources

Encouraging Physical Activity for Preschoolers with Visual Impairment: A Resource for Parents, J.D. Blaine & M.J. Lonergan, BC Blind Sports and Recreation Association, 2009, info@bcblindsports.bc.ca or www.bcblindsports.bc.ca

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