

MCB/DDS Partnership

Orientation & Mobility/Low Vision Services

www.mass.gov/dds/visionloss



Human Guide Considerations

Choosing a Side

There is no correct side to guide or be guided. The individual or the guide may choose a particular side for any reason including:

- **Ability:** The person may only have use of, or better use of one hand/arm.
- **Safety:** It may be safer for the guide to walk on the side closest to traffic or other hazard.
- **Support:** The individual may need to hold the handrail with one hand and the guide with the other so the guide would have to be on the side without a handrail.
- **Functional Vision:** If an individual has vision in only one eye or significantly better vision in one eye, it may be best for the guide to stand on the side with no/worse vision.

Switching Sides

It is common in many guiding situations that the individual will need to switch from one side of the guide to the other such as:

- **Fatigue:** The individual may get tired holding with one hand for an extended time and prefer to switch and use the other hand.
- **Environmental Factors:** The individual may need to switch sides in order to use a handrail; the guide may need to switch sides in order to open and pass through a doorway safely or walk on the side with traffic or other potential hazard.

Safely making the switch:

- The guide stops and turns in front of the individual to get to his/her other side without losing contact.
- Alternatively, the individual can cross behind the guide without losing contact:
 - The individual places his/her free hand above his/her other hand already on the guide's arm and steps behind the guide.
 - Individual moves the bottom hand across to the guide's other arm.
 - The individual removes hand from the original arm and moves to stand to the guide's other side.

Human Guide Considerations (continued)

Human Guide with a Long Cane

All of these options are at the discretion of the guide and the individual and based on location, ability, and/or preference:

- Individual can fold the cane and hold it in one hand while holding the guide's arm with his/her other hand.
- Individual can hold the cane vertically like a staff ("shepherd's position").
- Individual can hold the cane in diagonal position or with a reduced arc swing.
- Individual can give the cane to guide to hold (folded or unfolded).

Human Guide with an Adaptive (Push) Cane

All of these options are at the discretion of the guide and the individual and based on location, style of cane, ability, and/or preference:

- If the cane is foldable, the individual can hold the cane in his/her free hand in its folded position, or give it to the guide to hold (folded or unfolded).
- Individual can ask the guide or somebody else to carry the push cane.
- In some situations the individual may be able to leave the cane behind and then the guide can go back to get it (after safely guiding the individual to a different location).

Human Guide When Getting On/Off a Bus or Van

Ideally there will be two guides to assistance for safety when guiding an individual on or off transportation:

- The doorway of vans/buses is most often narrow so that one guide should be in front of and the other guide behind the individual when going up or down the bus/van steps.

When this is not possible and there is only one guide use the following technique:

- Guide the individual to the steps and tell him/her if they are going up or down.
- Assist the individual to locate a handrail or grab bar/pole.
- When going up/entering, the guide remains one step behind the individual all the way into the van/bus.
- When going down/exiting, stop at the first step. The guide carefully passes the individual to stand on the next step then precedes one step ahead and facing the individual until safely on the ground.

Human Guide Considerations (continued)

Human Guide with Individual Self Propelling Wheelchair

When assisting an individual who can self propel his/her own wheelchair for any part of a route, consider the following:

- If the individual knows the way to the destination or a particular part of the route the guide should walk behind the individual so that the individual uses his/her own skills. The guide should be ready to provide verbal or physical assistance as necessary for safety.
- If the individual doesn't know the route the guide can assume a human guide position by walking a step ahead and to one side of the wheelchair.
- See also the **Voice Guide** section below.

Descriptive Language

It is important for the guide to not only describe the area while guiding an individual, but also to explain the location and position of items relative to the individual:

- Use of descriptive language allows the individual to make sense of sounds, anticipate changes in the walking surface, become better oriented to the area, and potentially feel more comfortable walking with the guide.
- It is not necessary to describe every sight and sound, but it is important to describe anything that the individual might encounter, that would be useful for orientation, or that puts the individual at ease.

Examples of descriptive/positional language include:

- Indoors:
 - "Door opens toward you and is on your right."
 - "Turning into a narrow hallway with a coat rack to your left."
 - "The sound up ahead is a man vacuuming the rug in the hallway."
 - "The furniture has been moved for cleaning so now the couch is against the left wall."
- Outdoors:
 - "The dogs barking are on a leash walking in the park with their owner."
 - "On this street the stores are on your left."
 - "The sidewalk is under construction so we are going to walk slowly over some bumpy areas."

Human Guide Considerations (continued)

Descriptive Language (continued)

If the individual is still learning or doesn't understand left/right concepts:

- Always use "left" and "right" for total communication and to reinforce skills:
 - "We're turning left".
 - "There is a tree to your right".
 - "We're going through the door on your left".
- Tap the object (as appropriate) to produce an auditory cue. This is especially helpful if the individual has to reach for something:
 - "The table in front of you on your left side", while tapping the table to the individual's left.
 - "The handrail is on the right", while tapping the handrail.

If the individual has deafblindness use the communication system that works best for him/her: sign language/tactile sign, tactile symbols, object communication, and/or touch as appropriate.

Human Guide while Signing

- When possible the individual with deafblindness should hold the guide's arm with the non-predominant hand, leaving his/her signing hand free. In this way the guide and the individual may be able to communicate while walking.
- Have an interpreter or other person who can sign to the individual walk to the individual's free side.
- Stop to provide signed instructions or information then resume walking.

Voice Guide

Voice Guide is a technique where the individual follows voice cues with no physical contact with the guide. The individual can be walking or self propelling a wheelchair.

- The guide should walk facing the individual while intermittently turning forward to ensure safety.
- The guide continues to talk to the individual so he/she can continue to move toward the guide's voice.
- Encourage the individual to use protective techniques when walking through open space. (The individual should keep hand/arm up and across body at waist level and head level.)
- Maintain the individual's safety at all times ensuring with voice guidance and cues that the individual moves around objects or furniture.