

Using a Sighted Guide

Often, people with vision loss need some assistance with walking safely outside their familiar environment. Perhaps a friend or family member may try to help by holding your hand or having you rest your hand on her shoulder. While well intended, these methods are not safe and can lead to accidents. The following skills are designed to help you and your guide maximize safety and efficiency when walking together. If your spouse or other family member functions as your primary guide when you travel, it's very important that he or she be trained by a licensed O&M specialist. In the meantime, here are some tips every sighted guide user should know:

General Walking Position

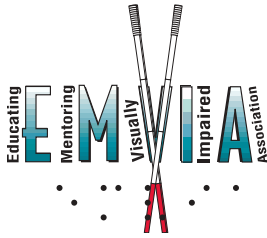
Hold your guide's arm just above the elbow with your thumb on the outside of the guide's arm with a grip firm enough so that you don't lose contact with the guide, but not so firm that the guide is uncomfortable. Your guide should walk a half step in front of you and to the side. Your left foot should be in line with the guide's right, or vice versa depending on where you are comfortable. As you begin to walk, your guide should always remain in front, explaining what's ahead.

Transferring Sides

There are many methods of transferring sides based upon your preferences. The most stable method is done after the pair comes to a dead stop. You place the back of your free hand just above your grip on the guide's arm and move the original grip hand across the guide's back to the guide's other arm as you sidesteps into the new position on the guide's other side, resuming the grip with the appropriate hand.

Walking in Narrow Spaces and Passageways

If the two of you are approaching a narrow space, your guide will signal the change by putting his hand behind his back. You then move to a position directly behind your guide. In a passageway, the trick is to avoid following the guide so closely that you step on his heels.



Going through Doors

When going through a door, you will need to know two things from your guide: which way it swings and does it open out or in? If the door opens on the right, you should be on the guide's right side. If the door opens on the left, you should be on the guide's left side. This may require a change of sides. If the door is closed, your guide should open it and you both decide who keeps the door open as you both pass through, shutting it behind you. If the hinges are on your side, you are responsible for holding the door. The sighted guide is responsible for seeing that you are on the other side if you cannot hold the door, and is responsible for holding the door or monitoring in such a way as to avoid injury to either party. Your hand should never slide on the door while it is opening or closing, nor should the door be contacted on the edge, but as close to the middle as possible.

Navigating Stairs and Curbs

In an unfamiliar area, the guide should indicate all level changes. With both ascending and descending curbs and stairs, the guide must approach the stairs perpendicularly. In this way, you are aligned so as to take the next step either up or down as the guide's movements indicate. Even once you get used to your guide's rhythm enough to time stepping up or down curbs and such, when approaching any such level change the guide should announce "Curb up," or "Stairs going down." Then, the guide should step forward and allow you to find the stair or curb with your toes. If there is a handrail, the guide should always position you on the side of the handrail and let you know where it is so you may use it, and it is best to take the railing before the guide takes the first step, unless he/she requests otherwise.

When traveling down stairs, you should remain one step behind your guide. Tell him that it's helpful to know how many steps are involved, and ask him to use a rhythm as you both take the drop off so that when the guide steps with his/her right foot, you do the same. When approaching the end of the stairs, the guide should say it's the last step.