

Tips for a Positive Graduation Experience for FC Providers

You are invited to attend a graduation ceremony. Here are a few things we would like you to keep in mind when attending graduation or interacting with a person with a vision impairment. Graduation day is intended to honor the achievement of our clients, guide dogs, and the puppy raisers. While members of the public are welcome to join in this formal celebration, be aware that the client's family or friends and/or their puppy raiser and their family are there too. With so many well-wishers, these can be busy and exciting events for all concerned, so it should be expected that most visitors will not be interacting directly with these people and dogs to honor and give space for these happy reunions and first-time meetings. We hope FC providers keep this in mind when attending, out of respect for the team as well as for safety for all.

* If you do have an opportunity to meet the client, please speak to the person first before addressing the dog. The dog may be excited to see you and we need to support the handler who must keep their guide dog calm and composed when/if greeting people. It can be a safety hazard if a dog is wiggling and leaping to greet familiar faces.
* If you feel you need to pet the dog, ask the client first since the dog is already working and the client needs to decide if they give permission to visit with their dog; if allowed, stay gentle and calm to minimize the dog’s excitement. We expect our dogs to be excited to see familiar people, but now it is important to respect that they must remain calm, and we need your help to do so.
* Visual impairment is a spectrum. Do not make assumptions; many people who are blind or visually impaired have some usable vision.
* GDB offers three client programs: guide dogs, K9 Buddy dogs, and OMI (Orientation and Mobility Immersion). Clients may participate in one or more of these programs over the course of their life. There are various reasons a client may feel one program is a better fit for their lifestyle, or an individual may qualify for one program, but not another. Please be sensitive when asking about reasons for pursuing their path at GDB.
* Keep in mind that the client has only begun to develop their trust and confidence in their new guide dog. If you are sharing stories about foster care, remember that dogs change as they mature; do not focus on negatives or stories of the dog misbehaving while it was in foster care. Instead, share positive and/or humorous stories of the foster experience. Sharing undesirable behaviors or medical conditions can be concerning to a new client. Please also consider similar conversation guidelines for potential interactions with the puppy raisers.
* Please do not offer any training advice or attempt to assist the client with managing or positioning their dog, even if asked.
* You never know if the client is outgoing, friendly, shy, reserved, etc. If you approach, do as you would with any new person and maybe they will welcome your visit!
* Graduation is a time to celebrate the graduating teams. To allow the focus of the event to remain on these very special people and dogs, and to make the best use of limited space, attendees are asked to leave other dogs at home, including career change dogs and current program puppies.

Thanks so much for your help getting these dogs to this momentous occasion! If you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to reach out to your coordinators.

To read more tips and information on "Access and Etiquette" when meeting a person who is blind or meeting a working Guide Dog Team, [visit our website](https://www.guidedogs.com/resources/blindness-and-guide-dog-etiquette) or ask for a brochure.