**Guide Dogs for the Blind: Meeting a New Guide Dog**

***For friends and family of a person introducing you to their new guide dog***

Here are a few tips on ways to help a friend, co-worker, or family member get the most out of the relationship with their new guide dog. Guide Dogs for the Blind strives to create a collaborative learning environment for our clients so they can take full advantage of opportunities to become competent, autonomous dog handlers. Your friend has been armed with dog handling and management skills that are practical, reliable, and relevant to their circumstances. We invite you to be a partner in their success!

**Guide Dog Teamwork**

* Guide dogs are trained to be mobility partners for people who are blind or visually impaired. A “guide dog team” consists of a “handler” who is blind or visually impaired (your friend) and a “guide” (the dog). The guide dog sees and leads; the handler gives direction and reward (food and praise).
* Your friend will need to continually reinforce the bond that he has with the dog, as well as maintain the training they have both received. Their partnership will continue to grow over time. Please respect and encourage the bonding process that is so crucial to the team’s success.

**Interacting with a Guide Dog**

* Greet your friend first and then ask permission to meet the new dog. It’s best to approach your friend one-on-one, rather than in a group. Please don’t be offended if your request to meet the dog is declined; the timing may not be appropriate, or your friend just may want to keep the dog focused on its work. Chances are there will be a better opportunity or environment in which to meet the dog at some later time, when your friend will happily introduce you to his new partner.'
* If you are given permission to meet the guide, speak softly and offer the back of your hand for the dog to sniff. The dog should be on leash, under control, and not feel cornered.
* When introducing children, it is also best to do it one-on-one, with adult supervision, and emphasizing gentle interaction (light petting, as opposed to patting or grabbing). Any dog can become upset if approached inappropriately. Careful introductions and guidance will help children understand appropriate behavior around dogs.
* Please don’t distract the dog while it is working; doing so could endanger the safety of the team or erode the dog’s training.

**Assisting a Guide Dog Team**

You may be used to offering assistance or providing sighted guide support for your friend, and that may not change. What will change is that the dog now becomes part of the equation, potentially reducing the need for sighted assistance. General etiquette still applies, but please direct your assistance to the person, not the dog, and never grab the person’s arm or the dog’s harness handle.

**Expectations as the Team is Adjusting to Home or Work**

* The dog will initially spend time on leash, tie-down, or in a crate when not working or playing. This will help ensure that the dog does not develop poor home behaviors. After the dog has experienced and earned incremental off-leash freedom, your friend may begin to confine the dog less. However, your friend can always withdraw the new-found freedom if the dog exhibits undesirable behaviors.
* Your friend will act as the dog’s main caregiver. Playing, feeding, relieving, and grooming are your friend’s sole responsibility.
* A guide dog should never be offered food or other distracting treats. Food rewards are used as a motivational and training tool by our alumni with their guide dogs, but those rewards are only given to the dogs by their handlers.
* When dealing with dog management challenges, GDB alumni are educated in how to use positive reinforcement techniques to maintain their dog’s attention. In addition to food rewards, your friend may use Clicker training to help the dog achieve desired behaviors.
* It is not unusual for friends or family to feel displaced by a new guide dog. The dog has now become an integral part of your friend’s life, and sometimes that is a difficult adjustment. These feelings generally resolve themselves naturally over time, but your friend can certainly enlist the help of the GDB counseling specialist for guidance. We want this process to be rewarding for all involved.

**Meeting Other Dogs or Pets**

* When a guide dog is introduced to another dog for the first time, it is best that they meet on neutral territory with the guide dog out of harness. Both dogs should be on leash, under control, and not allowed to play roughly or too freely. It is important that your friend be able to maintain verbal control of his guide.
* If your pet dog happens to distract the guide dog when it is working, verbally inform your friend that you and your dog are present, and proceed to get your own dog under control and standing still. Your friend may then choose to practice some attention exercises with his guide in order to maintain or re-gain the dog’s focus.
* Guide dogs and pet dogs should be separated during feeding time, especially during the guide’s initial transition to the home.
* Introduce a pet cat to the guide dog by letting the cat safely explore the new dog while the guide is confined in a crate or on leash.