

# WHEN YOU MEET A LEADER DOG

Our parents taught us to “mind our manners,” and most of us still follow those early lessons. There is one situation, however, your parents probably didn’t cover—***how to act when you meet a Leader Dog.***



## 1 A LEADER DOG IS A WORKING DOG

Leader Dogs are friendly animals that like attention. However, it is important that most of this attention comes from their human partners.

***When you encounter a Leader Dog:***

- Do not pet a dog in harness.
- Ask the handler’s permission before touching the dog or making eye contact. Eye contact can distract the dog, so always interact with the person—not the animal.

## A PERSON USING A LEADER DOG IS INDEPENDENT

Often, if a visually impaired person needs assistance, she will ask for it. If it appears the person needs help, **ASK FIRST**, then:

- Approach the person on her right side, as the Leader Dog is usually on the left.
- Never startle her by grabbing her arm.
- Do not take hold of the Leader Dog or its harness.

## 3 ASSISTING WITH VERBAL DIRECTIONS

When delivering directions to a person who is blind or visually impaired:

- Speak to the person—not the dog.
- Do not use hand signals such as pointing or broad statements like “It’s over there.”
- Use detailed, easy-to-follow indicators like “Go north two blocks, then east” or “Turn left and go two blocks.”

## NEVER OFFER FOOD TO A LEADER DOG

Leader Dog handlers follow a veterinarian-prescribed diet for their animals. Treats should only be given to a Leader Dog by its human partner.

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## 5 ACTING AS A HUMAN (SIGHTED) GUIDE

At times it is safer or easier to serve as a human guide instead of giving verbal directions.

To act as a human guide:

- Initiate contact by offering your elbow by brushing it against the person's arm.
- The person will hold your arm above the elbow and drop the harness handle, signaling to the dog that it is temporarily "off duty."



### AN ALTERNATE METHOD IS THAT THE LEADER DOG USER WILL INSTRUCT HIS DOG TO "FOLLOW" YOU.

- Walk ahead of the person at normal speed; inform him when he is approaching turns, doorways, stairs and drop-offs.
- At street crossings, walk with him across the street and onto the opposite curb. The Leader Dog will resume its duties once on the sidewalk.

## APPRECIATING INDEPENDENCE

Leader Dogs provide independent travel for thousands of people across the globe. As friends, family and coworkers of these people, we must respect the role their guide dogs play in their lives. Leader Dog handlers realize that their dogs create unique social situations. However, there is more to the person than just the dog. To help fulfill each person's potential, we also must remember to engage the individual as you would anyone else—sighted or not.

*The mission of Leader Dogs for the Blind is to empower people who are blind or visually impaired with lifelong skills for safe and independent daily travel.*



**LEADER DOGS**  
FOR THE BLIND



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