

Does your dog read traffic signs?

The most common misconception about guide dogs is that they make the decision when to cross the street. The dog is taught to stop at a change in elevation such as a curb or slope. It is then up to the blind person to listen to the traffic flow through the intersection. Once the handler feels it is safe to go, he/she commands the dog to move forward. This means that the dog is now in charge until they get to the other side.

Guide dogs are taught intelligent disobedience, which means that if the team is in danger, it is accepted to disobey a command such as forward. Once in the street, the dog should stop if a car comes too close to its path.

Blind people must be able to travel safely, but with the complex nature of today's traffic, street crossings are becoming increasingly difficult.



Stay "street smart" so that we all stay safe.
Guide Dog Users Inc. wants to hear from you!

If you have any questions, please contact us.

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What Drivers Need to Know about Guide Dogs and the Blind

A guide dog is a dog specifically trained to assist a legally blind person navigate his/her environment. The dog works with its handler by locating specified objects, avoiding obstacles and traveling safely. The Americans with Disabilities Act and laws in your state give these dogs the right to accompany their handlers anywhere the general public is allowed. Guide dogs and their handlers can be separated, sometimes permanently, in traffic accidents. Street smarts can help us all be safe.

The membership of Guide Dog Users Inc., a special interest affiliate of the American Council of the Blind, wants you to know more about our canine eyes.



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Stop, look, and listen!

Quieter car engines and more complex traffic make it crucial for the blind person to listen to the normal pattern on streets. Although it may seem helpful to honk your horn to signal when it is safe to go, a blind person may not understand what this signal means. It only disrupts the flow of traffic noise. Many people will wait for several cycles of a traffic light to cross at the beginning of a pattern. Calling to signal when it is safe is as distracting as a honk.

If you know a guide dog team and see them out walking, especially during a street crossing, do not honk or call to them, as it can distract the dog from its work.

It's just as important for you to look and listen as it is for the guide dog team. Turning right on red can be a dangerous situation, as many drivers are not looking at the intersecting crosswalk when turning. Only vehicles with sirens should worry about turning quickly. Take the time to check the right hand curb.

I brake for guide dogs!

Many states have passed "White Cane" laws which state that it is a traffic offense to strike a blind person carrying a cane or using a guide dog. These laws are often misunderstood by both motorists and law enforcement officers.

As a rule, always yield to the guide dog handler when possible, whether in a designated pedestrian crosswalk or not. NEVER leave the scene of an accident, no matter how minor, involving a guide dog team.

Uh-oh

To err is human, and canine. People will make mistakes in reading the flow of traffic or judging the correct spot to cross the street.

Flattened curbs with no specific edge or areas with no sidewalk can be very dangerous if the guide dog team does not know the area. Intersections with large rounded turning lanes may pose directional problems for the guide dog team.

Dogs will also be dogs. Different things may distract the guide from its straight path to the desired curb. Occasionally the dog's movements are so subtle that its handler does not detect the change in course until it's too late. It is important for all parties involved to stay calm and get to a safe place in case of diagonal or other dangerous crossings.

Check me out!

Motorists often say that the harness worn by the guide dog is difficult to see at certain angles. Some harnesses have reflective tape while other handlers attach lights for night travel.

The breeds of dogs used for guide work are primarily retrievers, German and Australian shepherds, collies, boxers and Doberman Pinschers, plus some mixed breeds. If you see this type of dog standing beside a person waiting to cross the street, assume it may be a guide dog and watch carefully as you negotiate the intersection.

Let's be careful out there!