

# How to be a good tour guide

## An insight into guiding visitors with a disability

**This material has been produced by volunteers Terry Hinkley, Andrew Hill and Terry Rhodes, in order to share experiences they have gained from years of guiding.**

Of course, if you guide for an organisation they may train you in the content and even the way in which you should present your tour. That's great, but there may still be ways that you could make your tour a little better.

We'd especially like you to think about how your tour/walk/talk might fit in with modern the legal requirements of the new Equalities Act (combining Disability Discrimination Act + others) that requires us all to make "reasonable adjustments" to make our environment/information as accessible as possible. The key word is "reasonable" and this does not always mean expensive and disruptive changes but often small and inexpensive tweaks to improve things for people. And those tweaks may as easily relate to how you prepare for and deliver your tour as to the environment in which the tour will take place.

Basically, if you can make your tour as stimulating and accessible as possible, then you will be improving it for ALL people, including those with a disability. This material particularly considers options for making tours more accessible.

### General considerations

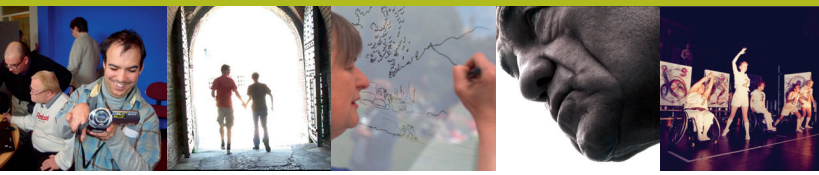
Everyone is different. Do not make assumptions based on appearance. Some disabilities may not be visible or immediately obvious.

A disabled visitor to your event is as much an individual as any other visitor. People with disabilities must have equal access to services and be treated with equal respect at all times.

Always ask a disabled person how you can help – do not leave them to ask and do not assume that you know best.

Always talk directly to the person with the disability – not to their companion or their carer/assistant.

Disabled people often dislike crowded areas because it can be hard for them to move around safely, can be difficult to get close to displays, can be hard to hear over high background noise and it can generally cause feelings of panic for some. Be aware of this and be prepared to assist as necessary.



## How to be a good tour guide continued...

### Use of language

It is important not to get too caught up in political correctness to the extent that you cannot say anything for fear of 'getting it wrong'.

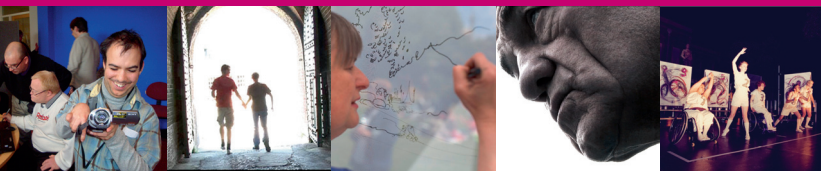
Don't worry or feel embarrassed about using common expressions such as "see you later" or "I've got to be running along". Most people use these phrases, including people with disabilities.

Talk to a person as a person, not as a "Symptom" or a "Disability." If you know a person's name, use it rather than describing them as "The person with ...."

"Disabled toilet" indicates that it does not work! "Accessible toilet" is a more accurate description. Similarly "Accessible parking bay" is better than "Disabled parking bay".

### Blind or Visually Impaired

- As you approach a visually impaired person, always announce yourself as clearly as possible.
- To guide a blind person, offer your elbow/arm. Walk slightly ahead and to the side of the visually impaired person who is holding your arm. Mention obstacles such as doorways, steps or ramps before you arrive at them.
- When offering a seat, put their hand on the back of the chair to allow them to seat themselves.
- If they have a working or guide dog do not fuss or pet the dog while it is working. Do not address the dog. If the tour is likely to run for some time, it is good to offer to get the dog some water.
- Be prepared to read out information. Try to speak clearly and not unusually slowly.
- Where possible, have documentation available in large print, in case it is requested.
- Always check that a visually impaired person has collected all their possessions before they leave the event.



## How to be a good tour guide continued...

### Deaf or Hearing Impaired

- To attract a deaf person's attention, use a gentle wave of your hand or a light tap on their shoulder. Do not ever shout.
- Look directly at the hearing impaired person to whom you are speaking. Talk clearly and at a steady pace. Do not use hand movements, as this can be distracting.
- Try to keep your face in the light and keep your hands away from your mouth. Do not eat while communicating.
- Do not raise your voice or shout as this distorts your mouth, blurs the sound and makes it difficult for lip reading and hearing aid users.
- If asked to repeat a statement, repeat it just as you originally said it. The person listening or lip reading may have understood half the words and wants to receive the missing ones.
- Have a piece of paper and a pencil available. Be aware that this may not always work for people who are profoundly deaf. They may only understand British Sign Language (BSL), not the written word.

### Mobility Impaired

- People who use crutches or walking sticks may find it difficult or tiring to stand in a queue for any length of time. Be aware of this and be prepared to assist or provide seating as necessary.
- People may struggle over some ground surfaces, inclines or curbs. Consider this when planning. Let people know about any difficult surfaces at the start. Be prepared to assist as necessary.
- They may not be able to keep up with the group or find themselves always at the back. Make sure everyone is caught up and invite wheelchair users to come to the front if they wish.
- Be aware that wheelchair users are at a low eye level and may not be able to see into cabinets or access information high on a wall.
- If you are giving information leaflets or anything that people will need to carry, be aware that they may have difficulties in holding items and propelling a wheelchair or using sticks. Offer to put items in a safe place, but let the person decide where items should be stored.



## How to be a good tour guide continued...

- Many people can find it difficult to change direction quickly or twist to look behind them. Give plenty of time and space for people move about.
- Never lean on a person's wheelchair or move it without their permission.
- Some wheelchair users may perceive you bending or crouching down beside their chair as condescending or patronising. It's usually better to get a chair and sit down in a position of their choosing. This helps make everyone feel equal. Or just ask if it is okay to crouch.
- You must NEVER lift a person in or out of their wheelchair unless you have been fully trained to do so.
- Have clear signs and easily accessible entrances and exits. This will allow people with mobility impairments to comfortably and confidently come and go. Aisles and reception areas need to be free of clutter and fire exits should be kept clear at all times.

### Learning Impaired

- Never treat adults with learning disabilities as if they are children.
- Make sure that you speak clearly. Use plain English with short, simple instructions.
- Be prepared to repeat yourself or rephrase what you have said if the person does not understand.
- Be prepared to read out information that you might expect other people to read for themselves.
- Always check that the person has understood what you wanted to tell them.