



Guide Dogs of America

Questions and Answers

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Q. How long does it take to train a guide dog?

A. About six months with a trainer, then an additional four weeks in class training with its blind partner.

Q. What breeds of dogs are used?

A. Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers and German Shepherds are the main breeds used by Guide Dogs of America.

Q. Of the breeds used by GDA, which makes the best guide dog, and why are other breeds not used?

A. Both sexes of all three breeds are used by GDA with equal success as guide dogs, as they all meet the basic requirements (suitable size, coat, health and temperament) and provide an ample variety of types to ensure proper "matching" with the blind partner. GDA occasionally uses other breeds, but with much less success.

Q. How many guides are working at the present time?

A. Approximately 7,000 in the United States. This figure, of course, is always changing.

Q. After applying, how long must an applicant wait before s/he will be enrolled in a class for training?

A. Processing an application (home interview, agency and personal references, medical report) usually takes 3-4 weeks. Placement in class, following final acceptance by the Selection Committee, may take as long as 2-6 months. Graduates who are returning to train with new dogs (retrains) are given priority, as such successors are vital to maintain their lifestyles. Classes are limited to 10 students.

Q. What is the cost of training a guide dog?

A. Approximately \$42,000, which includes the cost of training the person with the dog and ancillary expenses such as follow-up training. There is no charge to the blind person for the dog, the four-week residential training, special harness and leash, or follow-up.

Q. Does the school get financial assistance from the government?

A. We receive no State or Federal money; we rely solely upon voluntary contributions.

Q. For what reasons are dogs rejected as unsuitable for training?

A. Reasons are many and varied, but include: health issues, a high degree of dog or cat distraction, general suspicion, fear of traffic, and a lack of willingness.

Q. Can persons of any age have a guide dog?

A. The school will consider for training any legally blind adult who can use a guide dog safely and effectively. The minimum age to apply is eighteen; there is no upper age limit.

Q. Does the school examine the conditions in which the dog lives and works?

A. The home and work environment is assessed by the Guide Dog Mobility Instructor during the interview that takes place before the blind person is accepted for training and during follow-up visits.

Q. Can the public visit the training center?

A. Yes, Please call Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM, for a tour appointment.

Q. Does a dog ever fail to adjust to the student or vice versa?

A. Incompatibility between student and dog can occur, but in practice is rare. Both blind person and dog are studied carefully before pairing.



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Q. How qualified is a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor to work with blind people?

A. A Guide Dog Mobility Instructor must serve a three year apprenticeship at a Guide Dog School, learning all phases of the field. During this time, the apprentice must do extensive research, as well as receive much supervised instruction and “hands-on” experience (including blindfold work) working with blind individuals and training guide dogs. At the completion of the apprenticeship, s/he is given an examination by the California State Board of Guide Dogs for the Blind (a State appointed group of experts in various fields of blindness) to determine his or her knowledge and ability to work with the blind. So, by the time they receive their State Licenses, Guide Dog Mobility Instructors are well qualified.

Q. On what principle is the traffic training based?

A. That a moving vehicle within a certain area is a signal to stop or refuse to obey a command (intelligent disobedience), and a stationary vehicle is a signal to proceed.

Q. What is the average working life of a guide dog?

A. About 6 to 8 years, although some dogs work for 10 years or even longer. Most guide dogs are about 2 years old when service begins.

Q. What happens to the dog whose working life is at an end?

A. Generally, this coincides with the end of the dog’s life, but if it is too old to work, yet well enough to enjoy life without pain, it is kept as a pet by the owner, his family or friends.

Q. If the owner has to give up his dog for some reason, can the dog be used by another blind person?

A. Yes, after a period of re-training, providing the dog is not too old.

Q. Does Guide Dogs of America retain control over the treatment of the dog?

A. Guide Dogs of America has a policy that affects guide dog users’ ownership rights to their dogs. Immediately upon successful completion of the required training program, the blind person is given title to and ownership of the guide dog. If there is a problem, the school works with the graduate to solve the problem, or if necessary, with the veterinarian if the dog’s health is a concern.

Q. Does the dog have to be paid for on public transportation?

A. Guide dogs travel free when accompanying their owners on public transportation. For example, airlines will allow the guide dog to be with the owner in the aircraft, and do not charge for the dog.

Q. How does the dog know where the owner wants to go?

A. The owner has the ability and knowledge to travel independently and then directs his dog by commands.

Q. Where is a guide dog allowed to go?

A. State and Federal laws grant guide dog teams full access right to every place the public is allowed.

For more information, contact:

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