



# Tips for owners with blind or visually impaired dogs

Whether born blind or having lost sight through age, illness or accident, dogs are amazingly adaptive to life without sight and owning and training a blind dog can be a hugely rewarding experience!

Considerate communication will give your blind dog the right kind of support to help them understand the world around them!

## Safety first!

Blind dogs learn to navigate their usual environment but might struggle in new and unfamiliar places so keep them on-lead and go slowly so they can acclimatise. Within the home keeping furniture in the same place will help your dog feel safe!

Help your dog stay safe by padding sharp corners (i.e. coffee tables). You can also purposefully place mats next to entrances/exits, or under water/food bowls to help your dog learn to feel for these places with his feet!

When you're out and about in public spaces with your blind dog it's best to keep them on a long lead so there's no risk of panic should they become separated from you.

You can warn your blind dog about obstacles in the environment by having a special word such as "careful" when they look like they might knock into something. With repetition they will learn to slow down and feel around with their feet when they hear you say "careful".

## Tips for living with your blind dog

It is important to be consistent with any rules and routines you have put in place for your blind dog, so they can be confident and unlikely to become confused about their environment and interactions.

Most blind dogs will be startled if touched when they are asleep or not expecting it. You can help your dog to get used to this by gently touching them and immediately giving them a treat. Most blind dogs soon learn that being surprised is not necessarily a bad thing! However, occasionally a dog might become aggressive when surprised, as a means of communicating that they are worried and need to be left alone in order to feel safe. If your dog reacts in this way or appears to become increasingly more startled when practising this, you should stop right away and contact a qualified behaviourist to support you reduce your dog's anxiety.

Touch should always be positive for any dog, especially blind dogs so try not to interact with your blind dog when you are feeling frustrated or angry about anything, as they might sense this feeling from you and become worried or confused as they can't understand why you are feeling this way.

Instead of allowing people to come straight over and pet them, always allow your dog to approach a person in their own time, and only if your dog chooses to.

If you have other pets in the home, keeping a bell on their collars can help your blind dog know where they are.

Blind dogs can get anxious if you have left the room without them noticing, always tell your dog that you are leaving. You can use a special word or phrase such as "back soon"!

## Training your blind dog

Most importantly, you will need plenty of patience and time for training. You will also need plenty of imagination, because sound, touch and smell are key with a dog that can't see!

### **Hands-free! Training without touching!**

Use food to lure your dog into the behaviour you would like them to do. For example, to teach a sit you can put a treat near your dog's nose so that they can sniff it, then slowly lift it over their head – their bottom will naturally go down as they follow the treat with their nose – as soon as it touches the floor you can reward them by giving them the treat.

Teaching your blind dog specific words that are instructions is a very useful training technique with blind dogs. With the 'sit' for example, as your dog's bottom hits the floor when you're luring them with the treat say "sit". After several repetitions they will associate this physical action with the word 'sit' – you can now ask them to sit without having to use the treat to lure them, but you can still give it to them as a reward!

## Top Training Tip

Always speak to your blind dog and tell them what you are doing so they can feel safe and connected to you!

**Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs.**  
**If you need help for your Dogs Trust Dog please email: [reception@dogstrust.ie](mailto:reception@dogstrust.ie)**

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