When You Meet a Working Guide Dog Team

* As tempting as it may be to pet a guide dog, remember that this dog is responsible for leading someone who cannot see. The dog should never be distracted from that duty.
* A person’s safety may depend on their dog’s alertness and concentration. It is okay to ask someone if you may pet their guide. Many people enjoy introducing their dogs when they have the time. The dog’s primary responsibility is to its blind partner and it is important that the dog not become solicitous.
* A guide dog should never be offered food or other distracting treats. Food rewards are used as a motivational and training tool by GDB both in our dog training and by our alumni with their working guide dogs, but those rewards are only given to the dogs by their handlers.
* Although guide dogs cannot read traffic signals, they are responsible for helping their handlers safely cross a street. Calling out to a guide dog or intentionally obstructing its path can be dangerous for the team as it could break the dog’s concentration on its work. Listening for traffic flow has become harder for guide dog handlers due to quieter car engines and the increasing number of cars on the road. Please don’t honk your horn or call out from your car to signal when it is safe to cross, which can be distracting and confusing. Be especially careful of pedestrians in crosswalks when turning right on red.
* It’s not all work and no play for a guide dog. When they are not in harness, they are treated in much the same way as pets. However, for their safety they are only allowed to play with specific toys. Please don’t offer them toys without first asking their handler’s permission.
* In some situations, working with a guide dog may not be appropriate. Instead, the handler may prefer to take your arm just above the elbow and allow their dog to heel. Others will prefer to have their dog follow you. In this case, be sure to talk to the handler and not the dog when giving directions for turns.
* You may encounter a guide dog wearing a head collar, which is a humane training tool that helps a dog become calm and focused when distracted. The head collar is not a muzzle and is designed to permit the dog to fully open its mouth and can even be worn when the dog is eating, drinking, or playing.
* Access laws in the U.S. and Canada, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, permit guide dogs to accompany their handlers anywhere the general public is allowed, including taxis and buses, restaurants, theaters, stores, schools, hotels, apartment and office buildings. Guide dogs are trained to stand, sit, or lie quietly in public places when not leading.