

Part Two: General Advice for Guide Dog Owners and Families

1. Aftercare

1.1 Post Course Aftercare

After graduation, the instructor has a 1-2 week period available for conducting visits at home with the graduated clients. The number of visits carried out depends on the client's needs.

The purpose of this aftercare is:

- To assist the owner covering routes, so both dog and client make a correct and positive start. Remember – if a person is used to long cane mobility, mobility with a Guide Dog can be disorienting due to the loss of contact with a large number of known landmarks.
- To ensure routes are covered in the safest possible way in regards to road crossing points.
- To advise on specific applications of training, such as “straight line theory” and “near traffic reinforcement”.
- To ensure and advise on correct application of care and welfare at home in such areas as grooming, feeding, and relief procedures.
- To ensure security factors, such as fencing of yards and safe free running areas.
- To communicate with other people in contact with the new Guide Dog, and inform and instruct them as to their responsibilities. These may be relatives and friends at home, work colleagues in the work place, and the local vet. The instructor explains the GDTx routines to everyone.

Experience with other Guide Dog Schools has shown that the post class aftercare period is the most crucial time in determining the long-term success of a Guide Dog unit.

1.2 Monthly Report Forms

After graduation, the owner returns a form to GDTx at the end of each month. The instructor may contact and discuss problems identified by the owner. If necessary, a priority visit is made. Remember, the owner may contact the instructor at any time for advice over the phone.

1.3 Routine Aftercare

If possible, the first routine visit should be made three months after qualification, and then on an annual basis. Reasons for routine aftercare are:

- Responsibility of GDTx to our dogs – visits ensure that standards of care and welfare are being maintained for the dog.
- Responsibility of GDTx to the ongoing effective mobility of our clients – visits check all aspects of the dog's work. The instructor may advise on any problems the dog is having or on handling techniques to prevent the development of problems in the future.

Guide Dog Owner Information Booklet

1.4 Priority Aftercare

An instructor will visit a client as soon as possible if there is an emergency situation such as:

- A problem that, if not corrected immediately, may result in withdrawal of the dog. Examples include aggression, extreme left tendency, or severe suspicion.
- Investigation of an accident.
- A serious complaint from a member of the public about the owner's handling of the dog.

1.5 Refresher Training

If a problem has occurred that cannot be solved on an aftercare visit, refresher training may be required. This may involve:

- Returning the dog to the GDTx center for refresher training.
- Returning the dog to the client and completing the work at his/her home.
- Client attending the GDTx center for several days of training with his/her dog.

1.6 Providing Replacement Guide Dogs

- When a dog reaches nine years of age, the owner is re-interviewed if he/she wishes to retrain when his/her dog retires at ten years of age.
- Assuming the owner is able to retrain – deterioration in health could make retraining inappropriate – GDTx can begin looking for a suitable replacement dog to try to ensure there is no major time gap between retirement of the original dog and retraining.
- If ill health or other factors cause retirement of the owner's dog earlier than ten years of age, the owner will be re-interviewed as soon as the problem is identified.
- Clients awaiting replacement dogs have priority over first-time applicants.
- Once a dog has retired, the owner will have the option to retain the dog as a pet, provided care can be maintained. For example, GDTx does not consider it suitable for a retired dog to be left unattended all day at home while the owner is out at work. Alternatively, the owner may re-home the dog with friends or relatives. A representative of GDTx must meet with the adopting person or family to ensure suitability. If neither of the above is applicable, GDTx finds a suitable home for the retired dog.