

Health and Safety Statement of Intent for Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group

Our voluntary walking group is committed to providing a safe and enjoyable experience for all members, especially those with visual impairments. We will conduct risk assessments of proposed walk routes for the walking groups, paying particular attention to the needs of visually impaired walkers. A designated sighted guide will aid each visually impaired walker on every walk. There are various procedures for the walking group to follow including emergency procedures designed to ensure everyone's safety. We will follow all relevant health and safety legislation. The group will organise training for sighted guides to give information on the diverse types of visual impairment and give guidance of how best to guide a visually impaired person. It is important to note that every walker in the group is aware that they are walking at their own risk.

LIST OF HEALTH AND SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR SVIWG

1. Assessment of potential walk routes and the information to include in the description of a walk route
2. Emergency Procedures
3. Training for sighted guides
4. Rules for walkers
5. Rules for the management of guide dogs

Procedure No 1 – Assessment and a description of the proposed walk route

The walk leader will select a proposed route for the specific walking group and will assess the risks and the suitability by walking the route. The walk leader must walk the route at least once to provide a good understanding of potential risks and to provide a walk description, which will provide the details as below.

Description of proposed walking route should include the following information

Walk distance	Usually varies between three to eight miles depending on the walk group
Difficulty	For example- easy or minimal exertion / mild exertion / moderate exertion / high exertion due due to some steep climbs
Obstacles on walk	Include details of the types of stiles and number of stiles, information on steps, rocky sections, stepping stones, stream crossing, densely wooded sections, and any other obstacles.
Brief description of walk route	
Noteworthy features -if any	

Procedure No 2 - Emergency Procedures

1. The walking group will have an “appropriate person” as specified in the first aid at work regulations. The full regulations do not apply because the walking group is not “at work” under health and safety regulations.
2. An appointed person is a designated individual responsible for managing first aid arrangements in a workplace, which involves looking after the first aid equipment and calling emergency services. They do not need first aid training but act as the first point of contact in an emergency, taking charge of the situation until professional medical help arrives. This role is a minimum requirement for workplaces where a trained first aider is not necessary, (typically in low-hazard environments).
3. On all SVIWG walks the walk leader, and one other sighted guide, will be the appointed persons, as described above.
4. The walk leader should carry a mobile power bank to ensure that a charged mobile phone is available.
5. Ideally a whistle, a basic first aid kit and a survival bag will be available on every walk in case of an emergency.

Procedure No 3 – Training for sighted guides

1. SVIWG will provide training annually for new guides and for any guides who consider that they need a refresher of training.
2. SVIWG is providing training to reduce the risks of slips, trips and falls especially for the visually impaired walkers.

PROCEDURE No. 4 – Rules for Walkers

The Rules for Walkers provide clarity on how we organise our walks and to ensure that our walks are as safe and enjoyable as possible for all members of our group.

1. Whilst leaders, guides, and fellow walkers will make every effort to ensure the safety of the group, everyone taking part in the walk does so at their own risk.
2. All walkers must book their place in advance by the date given in the newsletter to ensure there are sufficient guides for VIP's. Booking is on a strictly first come first served basis. The decision of the person taking the bookings is final. Members who book on a walk and later find they are unable to attend should inform the "booker" as early as possible, preferably by the date given in the newsletter, to ensure that as many VIP's as possible could attend.
3. All walkers should wear proper footwear, preferably boots with ankle support and wear/carry clothing suitable for the weather, such as extra layer for warmth, waterproof jacket etc. All walkers should bring sufficient food and drink for the day and ideally carry basic first aid items.
4. Any walker with a particular condition that may require special consideration (examples include diabetes, anaphylactic shock, and epilepsy etc.) should inform the walk leader prior to the walk beginning.
5. The walk leader is in total charge, and all walkers must follow their instructions. Participation in the walk is at the leader's discretion. No other walker should walk in front of the leader. The leader will appoint a back marker, who will ensure that the group stays together. Anyone wishing to leave the walk early for whatever reason must inform the leader directly in person before leaving.
6. Walkers must close gates after use and should not leave rubbish, including apple cores and banana skins in the countryside.
7. No pet dogs allowed on walks.
8. Any guide dog not walking with its owner must have a sighted guide in control and responsible for knowing where the dog is always. The leader is the only person who may decide whether guide dogs need to be on leads or not. Guide dogs must be on a short lead or harness during coffee/lunch breaks. Procedure number five describes full details on guide dog management.
9. The walking group includes individuals with diverse needs and preferences. The group will try to accommodate these; all members of the group should respect and support the aims and operation of the group.

10. At the start of each walk the leader will
 - a. describe the route and give information about any specific requirements
 - b. make a check on attendance to provide the information for a check at completion of the walk
 - c. The walk leader should ask if anyone has a medical condition that may occur during the walk. The leader should receive any medical information in private but is not responsible to decide if that person can do the walk. (This would help the leader to inform trained medical staff if a situation did arise)
 - d. Before setting off check that all VIPs have a guide. This check is particularly important.
11. The walk leader should check that all the group are present or that they had left early when the walk ends.
12. The sighted guides must ensure that all VIPs are able to find their way home, if necessary, going with them to a suitable point where VIPs are confident to finish their journey independently.

Procedure No 5 – Rules for the management of guide dogs

Guide dog owners manage and handle their own dogs, the following points will, hopefully, help the owners and give guidance to everyone else.

1. In general, VI members who are guide dog owners prefer their dog to go with them on walks. Both for the exercise and because they need the dog to get them to and from the starting point of the walk. In addition, the Guide Dog for the Blind Association (GDBA) recommend that dogs are not at home on their own for more than three hours. Therefore, all official walks should be suitable for guide dogs and other VI members, walk leaders and guides should be prepared to tolerate them.
2. All dogs rush into water, roll in mud and eat animal droppings. Guides cannot prevent these actions; the guide dog owner must decide whether to bring their dog on the walk.
3. No dog can run loose on Access Land between the beginning of March and the end of July. Landowners can also specify restrictions at other times of the year and have the right to shoot any animal that is harassing their livestock without paying compensation. If walking on Access Land in this period, then dogs must, therefore, be on a non-expandable lead which does not exceed two metre length.
4. All walks might include opportunities for free running. The leader of the walk is the only person who can say when it is suitable for free running to take place. If someone else thinks that it is proper for dogs to run free, they should ask the walk leader or ask the back marker to negotiate with the leader.
5. The guide dog owner is the only person who can decide whether to allow their dog to free run. No one else should release a dog which does not belong to them. If a guide dog owner has asked a guide to take their dog on the lead and if free running is taking place, it is helpful if guides let their owners know what their dog is doing. The dog owner is the only person who should be calling their dog to avoid confusion of the dog. If free running occurs and when it is over the dog owner is responsible to call their dog and replace the lead.
6. Guide dogs should only work in harness when the walk leader has said that it is safe for guide dog owners to walk independently. When in harness the guide dog is working, and no one should distract it.
7. Guides should always walk on the right-hand side of guide dog owners as guide dogs are trained to walk on the left-hand side.
8. During any period when walkers are eating food, guide dogs must be on a short lead at the side of its owner to prevent it from reaching people's food. Equally, everyone should keep their own food away from dogs. Guide dogs must only receive food from their owners.

9. When approaching a stile, the guide owner should instruct their dog to 'wait' whilst they go over first. A guide should hold the lead or collar to ensure that the dog does not try to climb the stile until the owner is safely on the other side. When the owner gives the command for the dog to follow, the guide must then watch the dog as it climbs over the stile and guide its legs if necessary to ensure its safety.
10. Dog owners handle carrying water, first aid supplies and healthcare book for their dogs on all walks.
11. Guide dog owners need to assess the forecast of the weather and temperatures during the walk. Both extremely low and hot temperatures can become a problem. For example, guidance suggests that a surprisingly low temperature of 21 degrees Celsius can start to affect your dog. If temperatures reach 25 degrees Celsius then owners need to take great care to prevent dogs getting too hot and risking heatstroke. Guide dog owners must decide whether it is wise to leave their dog at home in adverse weather conditions.