

Ontario Blind Sports Association

An Introduction to Guide Running

A Pathway and Information for the Interested Guide



...in partnership with Achilles Canada





OBSA Guide Running Pathway (GRP)

Valid as of: September 2018



This Guide Running Pathway (GRP) builds off of the Guidelines set out by Achilles Canada and the Shared Vision Track Club

The Guide Runner plays a critical role to the development of visually impaired (VI) athletes. In providing this service to the athlete, you become a catalyst in the achievement of an athlete's lifelong goals in sport.

Becoming a sighted running Guide can be one of the most rewarding volunteering experiences you will ever have. Your time and energy will go directly toward helping another individual accomplish his/her personal goals.

The sighted Guide should be trained in guiding, communication techniques, and appropriate running terrain. The sighted Guide should recognize the value intrinsic in sport, be physically fit, and have a willingness to help others.

To become a Guide runner in Ontario, please join the Ontario Blind Sports Association membership base. *As a member of Ontario Blind Sports Association, you shall: receive invitations to all OBSA-sanctioned event, get high performance training opportunities, gain subscription to our quarterly newsletter, be kept informed about all sport opportunities in Ontario, as well as the countless benefits of being a part of an exclusive sport community.*

To register with Ontario Blind Sports Association, please follow the link:

<https://blindsports.on.ca/product/obsa-membership>

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Introduction to Guide Running

Being a Guide Runner can mean helping a friend as a recreational runner or supporting an elite-level athlete. As such, this Guide Running Pathway (GRP) has been sectioned to accommodate the needs of both recreational and elite-level Guides. The commitment of being a Guide runner for an elite-level athlete is significant—the blind athlete might be training most days of the week, and that can pose a geographical issue. Consider this as you evaluate your future as a Guide.

At times, there is a bond shared between an athlete and their Guide like no other – not only are you an important component of their training, but you have the potential to become an important member of their daily life. Guides must recognize their responsibilities and heed to the principles outlined in this document in order to ensure a positive sport experience for both runner and Guide.



- **Athletes - How to find a sighted Guide:** Approach local running clubs for volunteers. Running clubs may also be able to provide you with general information on training regimens. Select someone of similar height, fitness and ability, if possible.



- **Athletes - Once you have found your Guide...**
 - Run regularly with your partner before any event to get used to running with them so that there are no surprises on competition day.
 - Join a local gym; use a treadmill to build up your mileage when you are not able to use a Guide.
 - Try different methods of guiding to find the one that works best for you both the Guide and the athlete.



■ Guiding Methods

- Hold or cradle the elbow of your sighted Guide, who runs slightly in front.
- Hold a strap attached to the elbow or hand of your sighted Guide.
- Run behind your Guide with a restraint around their waist or chest. This is excellent for crowded street marathons or off-road running because the Guide need only find a single-width path.

■ Guiding Techniques

- **Tether** – this is the generally-preferred guiding method among VI athletes. The tether should be about 18-30 inches in length and can be made out of a variety of materials (i.e. rope, rubber, shoestrings, lanyards, towel, clothing, etc.). Each runner holds on to one side of tether. The Guide will continue to provide verbal feedback and warnings but can apply varying levels tension on the tether to Guide their athlete in a certain direction.
- **PVC Pipe** – some VI athletes like to run with a piece of pipe as it provides more rigidity than a cloth or rubber tether. Some choose to run with one pipe held similar to a tether or two pieces of pipe (one in each hand) in which the Guide would run in front of the athlete and arms would sway back and forth in a cross-country skiing type motion. Using two pieces of pipe also provides protection and boundaries from other runners during crowded situations (i.e. race). Note: over long distances, this technique may feel burdensome, and may feel too rigid.
- **Arm to arm** – in this technique the blind runner will place his/her hand on the shoulder or forearm of the Guide. New blind runners sometimes prefer this technique as they feel safer when they can touch the Guide, however arm to arm running does not allow the arms to swing in a fluid running motion and can become tiresome.

■ Guide runner: Facts

- A Guide runner is faster or has the potential to be faster than the VI athlete. For this reason, many top blind sportswomen consider male Guide runners as they may have an increased tendency to keep up in an elite-level competition.
- A Guide runner is of a similar height to the blind runner. This helps the Guide in being able to match the athlete's stride pattern. Technique isn't so important as the stride pattern and ability to keep pace.

- For long distance races, a relay of up to four (4) Guide runners is allowed, with changeovers every 10 km. For middle and long-distance track races, two Guides are allowed with only one changeover, which must be on a straight section of track.
- In official competitions, Guide runners always wear a bright orange running vest to distinguish them from the competitors.

■ **Guide runner: Tips**

- Use a tether of 18-24 inches.
- A Guide should try to maintain their normal arm movement; the VI runner will get more information from their Guide if the Guide moves naturally. This will also serve the Guide in distance runs.
- It is suggested that the Guide give a countdown to obstacles or turns that are coming up. For example, in the case of a speed bump approaching, they start counting down by informing the blind runner that a speed bump is coming in (say) ... “4-3-2-1-now” (30 feet, 20 feet, 10 feet, 5 feet, now). This technique gives the athlete some advance notice and they will understand the Guide's timing and ability to call out distances or steps.
- A Guides’ communication to their athlete during a run should be succinct. Words should be selected for easy signaling. For example:
 - "Toward me" = a step to the side of the Guide,
 - "Away from me" = a step away from the Guide,
 - "Left" = a 90-degree left turn,
 - "Straighten out" = the turn is over and there is room for the blind runner to pull away from the Guide,
 - "Step up" = pick up feet (tree roots, curbs, crack in the road)
 - "Ramp up" = slight incline, but no step up
 - "Step back" = to back off the pace because you are coming up on another runner.

■ **Other commands to announce to your runner**

- That they can start to run,
- That they need to stand still,
- When people are in front of them or that they are moving up fast on another,
- That water stations are coming up (the Guide retrieves water for the VI athlete),
- When turns are coming up,
- Distance left in the race,

- What other competitors are doing,
- How much room they have in front of them, how much room they have on their non-Guide side,

***Note: these tips are just that – recommendations on how to communicate with your athlete during a run. You may find in your experience that different commands or communication methods work better than others. Use your judgement as the sport leader to achieve the best modes of communication.**

Guide running techniques for children



****Important Note:*** Children living with a visual impairment are born with a potential for opportunity equal to those born with sight. It is a dearth of opportunities, limited expectations, and lack of training that lead to delays in the onset and development of their physical abilities and overall decreases in fitness levels.

- The “Guidewire System”
 - can be set up on a track, in a gym, or along a child's backyard or driveway. The rope must be pulled taught and attached to an eyehook in a gym, or attached to short poles outside; a carabiner, key ring, thick tape, or 4-inch PVC tube can be secured around the rope so that the child does not have to hold directly onto the rope. There must be a warning knot at least 2 feet from the end, and a difference in floor texture so the child does not run into a wall or the end poles.
 - **Advantages:**
 - (A) A child can run whenever he/she desires,
 - (B) High gait efficiency with a near full arm swing with both arms,
 - (C) The child can run in relays and perform locomotor skills independently beside sighted peers.
- The “Sighted Guide Technique”
 - the child holds the Guide’s elbow with the thumb out. The child may also choose to hold onto the runners' shoulder, hold their hand, or, depending on the child’s visual acuity, simply follow the runner if he/she wears a bright shirt.
 - **Advantages:**
 - (A) Fear is decreased because of the Guide.
 - (B) High gait efficiency with a near full arm swing with both arms,

- (C) Increased socialization in running with a peer or another individual.
- Tether
 - The tether is a short (18-30inch) rope held between the Guide and the individual with a visual impairment. It can be simply grasped or wrapped around each persons' hand, so as to avoid slippage. If a dangerous area of obstacle appears, the Guide would pull the runner closer to avoid injury.
 - The tether can be made out of a variety of materials (i.e. rope, rubber, shoestrings, lanyards, clothing, etc.).
 - **Advantages:**
 - (A) Runner has some space.
 - (B) Runner often feels more independent in their movements than with other guiding techniques.
- Caller
 - This technique requires a runner who is blind to run towards a Caller's voice. The runner is not restricted in any way and thus runs freely.
 - Sprints: The Caller can stand at the opposite end of the track to the runner.
 - Distance: The Caller can run behind, beside or in front of the distance runner holding a bell, keys, percussive instrument, or using verbal instruction.
 - **Advantages:**
 - (A) Runner independence: the runner is not restricted so arm motion can be full and natural, and the athlete can run as desired.
- Running with no assistance on a track
 - This can be set up with a child with low vision on a track that is dark with bright lines. It works best when the track is not crowded. It is recommended that the child not run alone.
 - **Advantages:**
 - (A) The child can run with full arm swing, therefore achieving a high gait efficiency.
 - (B) The child can run independently.
 - (C) The child can run side-by-side with a peer.
- Treadmill Usage
 - Any individual with or without a visual impairment can run on a treadmill. Treadmills are common in gym spaces and accessible to those with a visual impairment. It is recommended that the person start out slowly to get a feel for the motion, slowly working up to a comfortable pace, while avoiding sudden changes in speed.
 - **Advantages:**
 - (A) High gait efficiency.

- (B) The child can keep track of speed and distance.
- (C) The child can run on his/her own without need for a Guide.
- (D) Treadmills are found in gyms and fitness centers around the country.
- (E) Children can learn age-appropriate functional skills to be utilized after school age in making a lifetime commitment to an active lifestyle.

Guide "No-Nos"!

- Do not pull your runner; let them set the pace
- NEVER lose focus on the task at hand stay alert to your environment
- Never slow the blind runner because of your personal opinion; let the blind runner make the decision. Keep coaching to a minimal and know your role.
- In a race, do not finish ahead of the blind runner. In competitions, stay a half-step behind the runner - a finish with the Guide head of the blind runner will result in the disqualification of the blind runner in a sanctioned race.
- Never forget that it is the blind runner's race. A Guide's role is to facilitate the runner's experience in a competitive environment – although the Guide typically gets recognition for their achievements, do not ever doubt the reason for your presence at a competition.

Other tips to keep in mind ...

- Guide who are new to their role are often nervous and become overly cautious. Have an open dialogue with your partner to figure out what works best - everything becomes much easier with lots of communication and a little bit of practice.
- Provide a descriptive narration of your runs. Tell about things of interest (i.e. water fountains, landmarks, bathrooms, landscape). Your descriptions help the blind athlete build a mental picture of their run.
- Be succinct and explicit in your directions and commands. “Be careful up here” does not help the blind athlete understand what to do. Instead say “move to the left, we are coming up on a crowd of people in about 100 yards”.
- State the action first: don't say “we're coming up on some cars, so...”, instead say “step to the right, we're coming up on some cars”.

- When changes in terrain are present, be sure to state them verbally and direct the runner appropriately (i.e. “step up” “step down” “curb up” “curb down”).
- When guiding, be sure to keep arms and tether (or other device) moving in a smooth, fluid motion. In an effort to be cautious, new Guides tend to keep the arm linking them to their partner very rigid. This will lead quickly to fatigue and an unpleasant running experience.
- In competition, it is important to allow the blind athlete to finish ahead of the Guide. Most sanctioned races will disqualify the blind athlete if the sighted Guide crosses the finish line first.

Competitive Guiding – Mandatory Requirements

- Monthly Progress Reports (MPR’s)

As a Guide to a competitive athlete in Ontario, OBSA requires that a strict log be kept to track the progress of the athlete as well as the athlete-guide relationship dynamic. Through these regular reports, better direction in athlete training can be provided, as well as an ongoing assessment of the ‘fit’ between the athlete and their partner. These reports should be completed by the Guide with no input from their athlete. A template for your MPR will be issued upon request.

- Competition/Meet Quota

Athletes in track & field are aware of and attend many local, regional, provincial, national, and international competitions during any given season. As such, entry into a minimum number of competitions/meets is required. This number will be agreed upon between the athlete, Guide, and the Association, as per the competition schedule per athlete.

- OBSA’s Annual High-Performance Training Camp

This training camp is designed for elite athletes to excel in sport. Athletes are exposed to high levels of training and expertise at this annual weekend-long event. This incredibly rare program hosts over 30 high performance VI athletes at the provincial, national, and international level.

- Athlete Profiles

To get started on the right foot, Ontario Blind Sports Association can offer interested Guides full Athlete Profiles (APs) displaying the most up-to-date information on athletes looking for a Guide.

For any inquiries, please contact OBSA Program Manager at richard@blindsports.on.ca