

# Self-Service Café Guide for Helping Blind and Partially Sighted (BPS) People

*This guide has been written in collaboration with blind and partially sighted people working for Sight Loss Councils (SLCs).*

## **1. Visual impairment is not Always Obvious.**

Not all blind or partially sighted people wear dark glasses, use a cane or guide dog. Some may have useful vision, allowing them to navigate without a visible mobility aid, but they may still require assistance.

They may be wearing a Sunflower badge or lanyard, making it easy to recognise them as someone requiring assistants.

As staff, it's wise to keep an eye open for someone standing still or looking unusually cautious.

There's always a chance they need some help because of impaired vision and finding this out early makes everything in this guide much easier.

If they do have a cane or dog, it's still best just to ask if they need help. This way, they can tell you what they need. It is up to them to make it clear, but you can help by making sure they know it's a self-service café.

A simple query also gives them the chance to say no, perhaps because they can manage, or are just waiting for someone.

## **2. How to Assist?**

Starting with a clear greeting is always best. A BPS customer might not be able to find staff unaided or see who is in uniform. “Hi, I’m Alison, I’m a member of staff, can I help?” goes a long way.

Self-service works in many ways and a BPS customer is unlikely to understand yours fully without help. If you have separate sections for different refreshments, for instance, you can describe these before you start. The person will then need help to find what they want and pay.

This may well mean you need to carry their tray, but others might prefer you to walk close to them while they carry their own.

When you reach a desired section, they will probably need a rundown of what’s on offer. They have a legal right to full information, so don’t skip things unless they ask you to.

If it’s a buffet, it is best to find out early if they need help to serve themselves. This is very likely but always good to check.

When the BPS customer has finished, they may appreciate freedom to leave without returning a tray. Getting help to do this isn’t the best use of staff time either.

They would be more efficient helping BPS customers to the exit and then dealing with trays afterwards.

As ever, some might manage this part alone so it’s best just to be ready with an offer of help.

It is handy if staff keep a lookout for BPS customers leaving, that way they can simply come over at the right time and find out what’s needed.

So, make all this simpler, be sure to read section on guiding.

## **3. Social distancing and hygiene**

Many BPS people will find it hard to maintain the recommended social distance. If there is not a safe alternative, they may need to be physically guided. Face masks and hand sanitisers are therefore doubly important for giving safe assistance.

## **4. Guiding Tips**

Despite social distancing, physically guiding BPS people is almost unavoidable in self-service cafes.

It’s always best to Ask someone how they prefer to be guided,

by following you, placing a hand on your shoulder or elbow. You can also help a person to get seated by placing their hand on the back of a chair.

Verbal guidance is also an option, if the person is comfortable with it.

Clear directions are vital here e.g., “the chair is about three steps in front of you, to your left, at 10 o’clock”. It might also help to tap a chair/table, so the person can hear where it is. Putting a tray down before helping someone find their seat is always wise.

If carrying a tray, it is still possible for a BPS person to hold your arm/shoulder. They will still detect all the necessary signals as you go.

A mixture of guiding techniques is probably best for self-service, but if you’ve got a conversation going early and with confidence, everything should flow quite naturally from there.

## 5. The Law

The Equality Act 2010 states that services need to make reasonable adjustments, so disabled people are not disadvantaged and can gain equal access to services.

All actions suggested here are reasonable; they pose little inconvenience to businesses, while more sensitive issues like guiding have been authorised in spite of Covid.

This legislation also includes equal access to information, which here means a right to full knowledge of the items on offer.

Cutting corners with this for speed is therefore illegal/unreasonable.

For more on reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, visit: [here](#).