



# ANIMAL EYE SERVICES

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# Blind Dog Pack



*Blind dogs see with their hearts*

## HELPING YOUR PET COPE WITH VISION LOSS

Vision loss in your pet can be an emotional time for all family members and the emotions you go through are quite normal, but remember, there is something you can do for your pet.

Initially, it is important that you all are aware of the problem and give yourselves and your pet time to adjust.

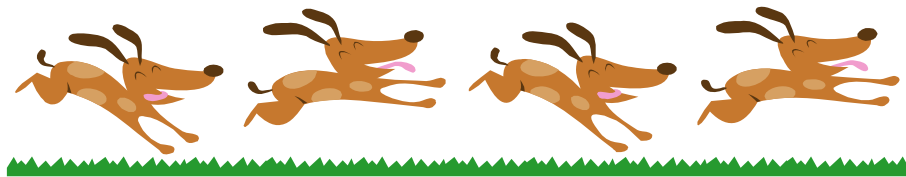
Most animals will begin to rely more heavily on their other senses such as hearing and smell to help them get around and seem to have a built in "radar" that helps them navigate their environment. They learn very quickly to negotiate their territory with ease without bumping into objects. You can help your pet by keeping its environment as stable as possible.

With a little guidance from you, your pet should live a perfectly happy and comfortable life.

Here are some helpful tips that will help you and your pet to develop your relationship on a new level:

1. You should try to educate any small children about your pets blindness so that they will approach him/her without startling them.
2. You and any guests or children should "announce" your presence to your pet by clapping softly or whistling, so that he/she knows you're there.
3. Wearing bells around ankles or wrists may assist in alerting your pet to your whereabouts.
4. Leave a TV or radio playing softly near the pet's bed (or wherever they spend the most time when you are gone) the sound is soothing, and may help prevent excess barking.
5. Another sighted dog in the household may act as companion for a blind dog and be of great benefit, literally becoming the dog's own "seeing eye dog". Always make sure it is going to be the right decision for your family to get another dog, as it will increase the responsibility of all family members and another dog may not suit the personality of all blind dogs. But, if you like the idea of another canine companion, inquire with friends if their dog would like to be a regular visitor to the household. This way you can trial your blind dogs tolerance to another canine companion.
6. Your pet can exercise normally but you should always supervise him/her especially when they are in unfamiliar surroundings.
7. Pools are a problem for blind animals so you should make sure that your pool is fenced and secure. Also be aware of holes or cliffs with sudden drop offs.
8. If he/she keeps bumping into things talk to us about making a collar with canes. The canes stick out in front of his/her head so they give them an early warning of walls and objects. ( see instructions attached or visit [www.angelvest.homestead.com](http://www.angelvest.homestead.com) )
9. Scented perfume and oils can be placed on the edges of furniture. This is particularly good to assist your pet to be able to "map" out the area especially if you need to move furniture around or are moving house.

10. Using verbal cues when around your pet will reassure him/her and assist with retraining. Words like “up” or “down” for stairs or “careful” when he/she approaches an obstacle. For blind dogs that are deaf, special training devices can be purchased to assist when verbal cues won’t help.
11. The garden can also pose a challenge for your pet. One solution is to plant your garden with highly scented plants or distinctive smelling plants to help your pet move freely around the back yard. Different smells can allow your pet to “map“ out the area and slowly regain its confidence.
12. Keep food and water bowls in the same area. Use matting which is textured differently from the surrounding floor, this will let your pet know that food or water is nearby.
13. Allow your pet play time. Give him/her toys that work with other senses (see attached information).
14. Have a safe area for your pet. Use designated bedding or matting which has a different feel from other areas in the house. Your pet will learn that this is an area they can feel safe and regain their bearings.
15. When exercising your pet, have a couple of different routes that you use for walking. Once your pet has “mapped” out the route, its confidence will grow and eventually he/she will be taking you for a walk.
16. Try using textured matting, such as the grass matting on the edge of stairs so that your pet can feel when to step off the steps. If stairs really pose a problem, build a ramp for him/her to use.
17. Always remember to be patient when training your blind pet, this is a challenging time for him/her as well.



## **TOYS FOR BLIND DOGS**

As a dog gets older it tends to become less active, sleeps more and may even gain a little weight. This does not necessarily diminish the need for them to be stimulated.

Exactly the same is true for blind dogs.

Due to a loss of vision ( progressive or sudden) a blind dog tends to naturally slow down and sometimes it may gain weight. The need to be stimulated and have quality time to play with their owner almost becomes a necessity. The amount of stimulation and play time activity will of course depend on how active the pet was prior to going blind.

Owners of blind dogs may notice that their pet's other senses become more enhanced, there are some wonderful toys available which rely on a pet's sense of hearing, smell and touch.

Listed below are some, with a little imagination the list is endless.

- A ball with a bell – pimple balls are excellent as they are the size of a tennis ball, durable and have a pimply texture.
- A giggle treat ball – great for the food motivated pet, available in different forms with or without giggle device.
- Rope or furry toys – offers different texture
- Squeaky toys - make noises and they come in a variety of different shapes and textures.
- Scented tennis balls or other scented toys.



## INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST



### BLIND DOGS

[www.landofpuregold.com/kaytee.htm](http://www.landofpuregold.com/kaytee.htm)

This is the life story of a special Golden Retriever, Kaytee who was blinded at 6 weeks of age.

[www.blinddogs.com](http://www.blinddogs.com)

This is a wonderful and inspirational website filled with stories of blind dogs and links to many other useful sites.

[www.blinddogs.net](http://www.blinddogs.net)

Offering support and information to the owners of blind dogs and also other blind dog stories to read.

### INFORMATION ABOUT GENETIC (DNA) TESTING FOR EYE DISEASES

[www.optigen.com](http://www.optigen.com)

Provide high quality diagnostic service and information

[www.gtg.com.au](http://www.gtg.com.au)

provides genetic testing for dogs in Australia ( including all the tests provided by Optigen).

### INFORMATION ABOUT EYE DISEASES

[www.animaley.com.au](http://www.animaley.com.au)

Our own website with many information about eye diseases in cats and dogs.

[www.eyevet.info](http://www.eyevet.info)

Canadian Veterinary Ophthalmologist, Mike Zegler offers interesting information on a range of diseases and eye problems.

[www.veterinaryvision.com](http://www.veterinaryvision.com)

A veterinary ophthalmology website that has some useful information on what dogs see.

Further reading is a book called Living with Blind Dogs( Caroline D.Levin RN).

Encouraging and educational, this book motivates the reader that all is not lost for their blind dog. It covers aspects of training your vision impaired dog as well as tips for making your home a safe environment.



When JD, a blue cattle dog, was diagnosed, at age 8, with glaucoma I was extremely depressed and asked “what could I have done to prevent it?”. After a day or two I realized that the question I should be asking was “what can I do to make JD’s life as pleasurable as it always has been?”

JD was always a ‘nutter’ for playing ball and going to the beach, chasing seagulls and swimming. I realized that there was absolutely no reason why she should not continue to do these things even after she went blind. It was up to me to find a way for a smooth transition from sight to eventual blindness.

We were lucky that she was going blind gradually, thus gave us time to prepare for the inevitable.

As JD is a reasonably intelligent dog and has spent time at obedience school, learning the usual come, sit, stay, etc. I thought it would be fairly easy for her to learn new commands. I decided that the most important words to assist her were:

- Right
- Left
- Wall ( a substitute for any obstacle in her way of getting from ‘a’ to ‘b’)
- Gentle ( not to run a thousand miles an hour)
- Back up
- In front

With these words she could hopefully continue life as before.

About a week after being diagnosed, and still having sight, I put the training lead on her and we walked around the back yard and every time we turned left or right those words were used. When we went forward I used the command ‘in front’ and backwards was ‘back up ‘. We did this for about ten minutes a day and then started doing this ‘off lead’. I also walked her around the backyard and inside the house gently touching her nose to obstacle like chair, lounge etc. and used the word ‘wall’. Whenever she was going to bump into something I said ‘ wall ‘ and either back up, right or left.

It is now 8 months since she was first diagnosed and has, in the last 4 months, had both eyes removed ( she kept her ‘eyes’ and had implants to keep her eyes looking ‘normal ‘). Yet every morning when I let her outside (she sleeps inside) she runs straight to the laundry, that’s where the ball is kept, and waits for me to come and play. We have done this every day since she was 8 weeks old and she sees (pardon the pun) no reason why we should stop. The ball has a ‘squeaker’ in it so it makes a noise when thrown along the ground, the words left, right, in front and back-up come in handy. She always ends up with the ball in her mouth and drops it at my feet to start again.





When we go to the beach I continually talk to her so she knows where I am and can follow me , and when any strangers appear and want to pat her I always explain her situation and ask them to talk to her and let her smell them first. Then she has no problem as she has always enjoyed human company and attention.

She continues to be a happy, healthy, lively companion and everyone says that they can't believe she is blind. So all I can say is that after the initial trauma and distress of being told that your dog will eventually go blind there is a happy, healthy life after being diagnosed with glaucoma.

JD is the living proof.

All you need to do is have a little common sense and ask yourself “what would I do/want, to make my life enjoyable if I was going blind “?



## “ WHITE CANES “ FOR BLIND DOGS

An easily made, inexpensive collar device can help a blind dog avoid obstacles and hazards. The dog learns to interpret pressure and sounds from the “canes “on its collar to avoid running into objects or falling off elevated areas. The necessary equipment is easily obtained and simple to assemble into a workable device for aiding the dog in maneuvering in its environment.

### What you need:

A heavy leather collar, 2 plastic ties, rubber hose and 2 bolts ( 3/16 x 1 inch) .

### Assembly:

A wide thick leather collar is a stable foundation for the canes, woven nylon collars are unacceptable because they sag from the stress of the canes’ weight and movement.

The canes must be flexible enough to fold or bend rather than become entangled by chair legs or other obstacles.

Flexibility of the canes also allows the animal to be comfortable when sleeping or lying down. Rubber mountings reinforce the plastic canes at the attachment sites to help keep them in position.

Plastic ties ( ¼ x 15 inches ) are available at electrical wholesale or auto parts suppliers.

Two ties, once for each cane, are needed, but several extra are useful in case of breakage. Don’t trim the canes ‘ length until the assembly is on the animal; then trim so the canes extend 3 inches past the dog’s nose.

Rubber hose reinforces and attaches the plastic ties to the collar. Rubber fuel line ( 3/8 –inch ) can be purchase at auto parts suppliers. The hose may have a slight curve from being stored on a roll. When attaching the hose to the collar, keep the concave portion of the curve facing in toward the dog’s muzzle to discourage the canes from splaying apart.

Use a razor blade to cut off two 6-inch pieces of rubber hose. Cut a bevel in the last inch of the end of each piece so that the curves face in towards each other when the bevels are bolted flat to the collar.

Buckle the collar to the proper neck size before attaching the canes. This helps determine the correct position of the canes so they balance each other. Attach them to the collar so their weight tends to keep the collar upright.

Fasten the assembly together by passing the canes through the hose to create a mounting support with the rubber bevel inside the collar and the plastic tie buckle outside; the collar is clamped between them.

Drill a hole ( slightly smaller than the bolt) through the bevel and collar to match the hole in the plastic tie buckle. Fasten the bolt with washers on both sides, clamping the assembly tightly to the collar.

This device is easily constructed, costs very little and makes a real difference in a blind dog’s ability to avoid obstacles and hazards.

You can also visit: [www.angelvest.homestead.com](http://www.angelvest.homestead.com) ( using a vest instead of a collar)

