



American Blind Skiing Foundation

GUIDING REFERENCE MANUAL

by

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DISCLAIMER – The techniques addressed within this document should only be used by those who have received proper training and in the proper circumstances. PSIA certified guides with adaptive training are an excellent resource for aspiring guides.

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A Word from the Authors

This is a quick reference guide for guiding blind and visually-impaired skiers, and is intended to be used only as a supplement to in-person guiding instruction. Our skiers place a lot of trust in their guides. A guide should do everything possible to be mentally and physically ready for guiding. Annual participation in a guide and skier training clinic should be considered an essential part of your preparation, as a months-long layoff from guiding will inevitably put some rust on your knowledge, skills and reaction time. Guiding on a regular basis will help keep your skills at the highest level possible. Peer-review of your guiding skills during the season should also be considered, even for the most experienced, seasoned guides. Every skier represents a unique challenge to the guide. Experience guiding one particular skier will not prepare you sufficiently to guide every other skier. Seek input from other experienced guides with respect to every skier you consider guiding, and always be cautious.

Joe and Odile

1. Expectations for ABSF Guides

Here are a few basic expectations we have for a well-trained ABSF guide:

1. Always inform the trip Leader if you plan on attending an event to insure we have a sufficient number of guides for the expected number of skiers.
2. Assist when possible with the transportation of skiers, and arrive promptly on days for which you have committed to guide.
3. Do not change guide-skier pairings without the trip leader's approval, and stay with the skier all day or until a guide switch is accomplished.
4. Assist the skier through the lodge area, eating areas, cafeteria, restroom areas, and, on overnight trips, to their room.
5. Help the skier locate equipment inside and outside. Assist with acquiring and returning rental equipment.
6. Help the skier carry equipment when necessary and to ensure safety, and assist the skier getting equipment on and off, when necessary.
7. Check the skier's equipment for irregularities, e.g. binding not fully closed or broken pieces, and make sure that you and your skier are wearing an ABSF bright orange bib. Return bibs to the Trip Leader at the end of the day.
8. Keep Trip Leader and Ski Patrol phone numbers in your cell phone.
9. Help the skier navigate through crowds, and assist the skier with lift loading and unloading.
10. Stay focused on guiding when on the slopes and NEVER leave a skier unattended.
11. Communicate clearly with the skier while guiding.
12. Continually observe the skier's condition, checking for signs of fatigue, dehydration, frostbite, and negative changes in physical or mental condition, which may create an unsafe situation.
13. Inform the trip leader or ski patrol of any problems immediately.
14. Ensure the skier's safety at all times.
15. Do not provide instruction / pointers / ski tips unless the skier wants you to do so. If a safety issue exists that you must address, do so in a respectful manner. Share the safety concern and participate with the skier in solving the matter.
16. Participate in one Guide and Skier Training Clinic every two years.
17. Actively participate in ABSF outreach, recruiting and fund-raising events.

2. Expectations for ABSF Skiers and Boarders

Here are a few basic expectations we have for participating skiers and boarders:

1. Always inform the trip Leader if you plan on coming to ski to assure a sufficient number of guides, and refrain from attending unexpectedly.
2. If you are being provided transportation to the event, be ready to go when your driver arrives.
3. Arrive promptly for skiing on days for which you have committed to come if using your own transportation means.
4. Carry your own equipment yourself.
5. Be open to the Trip Leader's guide-skier pairings. If you have a particular concern with your assigned guide, let the Trip Leader know as soon as possible so your concerns can be addressed.
6. Share any safety concerns and willingly participate in solving them with your guide.
7. Share all important information with your guide during the skier's assessment about your physical conditions, aches and any impairments to assure safety.
8. Wear our ABSF skier's safety bib at all times while on the slopes.
9. Keep Trip Leader and Ski Patrol phone numbers in your cell phone.
10. Stay focused on your guide's directions while skiing and promptly respond to them.
11. Stop immediately when you are unable to hear or understand your guide's commands.
12. Inform your guide of any signs of fatigue, dehydration, frostbite, and negative changes in physical or mental condition, which may create an unsafe situation.
13. Participate in one Guide and Skier Training Clinic every two years.
14. Actively participate in ABSF outreach, recruiting and fund-raising events.

3. At the Lodge

1. **Communication is key:** Help your skier "visualize" what you see with words. Depending on the visual impairment, your involvement will differ from one skier to the other, but always be prepared to assist as much as you can.
2. **Be as specific as possible:** Describe environment, objects (table, chairs, garbage cans, etc.). Let the skier know where they are (by the fireplace, the windows, the left corner of the room) and where their belongings are located.
3. **Walk side by side, skier holding your elbow:** When space permits, this technique is one which most visually-impaired people are well acquainted with.
4. **In narrow passages, have the skier walk behind you, hand on your shoulder:** Use this method in order to pass around or between obstacles such as gear lying on the floor, close tables and chairs or narrow staircases. A side-by-side shuffle may be necessary in

some instances.

5. **Move obstacles when possible:** If needed, do not hesitate to move chairs, tables, or gear bags around to make it safer for you and your skier to pass.
6. **Walk at the skier's pace:** Adapt to your skier's pace to reduce stress.
7. **Respect the rendezvous time and place:** Follow the Trip Leader's instructions and be at the right place at the right time especially at lunch time when a shift of guide is planned. Make sure your skier will have time to get some rest and lunch.
8. **Note rack location:** Let your skier and the skier's next guide know where the skier's skis are located. Leaving a bright colored bib or ribbon over the skis can help locate them easily.

3.1. Walking Hazards

- **Change of surface:** Let your skier know when you transition from carpet to tile, tile to wood floor, wood floor to carpet, carpet to concrete, concrete to snow/ice, etc.
- **Difference of levels, uneven surfaces:** Let your skier know when a difference of level is coming and if it's lower or higher (e.g. carpet edge, door threshold, ramp, snow build-up).
- **Dangers:** Water always makes footing slippery. So be prepared and let your skier know if a wet or slippery surface is present.

3.2. Stairs

- **Orientation:** Generally describe any approaching set of up/down stairs.
- **Handrail location:** Describe the handrail location, then stop before the first step and let the skier feel the first step and handrail.
- **Shape:** Describe if the stairs are straight or curved, and let your skier know if they will have to make a turn at a landing or some point.
- **Number of steps:** You may casually mention whether its just a few stairs or full flight.
- **Dangers:** Water always makes footing slippery and outside stairs can be covered with snow or ice. Warn your skier before stepping onto a slippery surface.

3.3. Doorways

Doorways can be dangerous so it's important that you describe them to your skier:

- **Type of door:** Is it a regular, sliding, revolving door? Is it a double door with a central post? Always let your skier know you are going through a door and the type of door.
- **Hinge location and Direction of swing:** Does the door open toward you or away from you? If it opens toward you, you and your skier might have to take a step back while opening the door. Typical descriptions would include "Door opening away from us to the right" or "Door coming toward us to the left".
- **Dangers:** Hinges or door closers are potential dangers where your skier's hands or fingers could get hurt. Pay particular attention to them and make sure your skier doesn't accidentally put their hand where it could get hurt. Double doors with a central post can also be an issue. Make sure your skier doesn't walk right into it by letting them know there is a center post and carefully guiding them around it.

3.4. At the Cafeteria

When its time to rest and re-fuel, it is your responsibility to assist your skier:

- **1 or 2 trays:** Try to make it simple by taking only one tray for both of you unless the tray is too small and two are needed. Don't rush; take your time to carry them safely one at a time if necessary. You might carry the drinks while the skier carries a tray of other more stable items.
- **Reading the menu:** Depending on the skier's visual impairment, you may need to read the menu including the price of each item. Speak slowly and allow them time to decide.
- **Time to pay:** Make sure your skier tenders the correct amount of money and receives the correct amount of change in return.
- **At the table:** Describe to your skier the location of plates, cups and other items on the tray, as well as the arrangement of specific food items on their plate. It may help to use the "clock face" method.
- **Cleaning up:** Assist your skier when the time comes to clear away the garbage and return the trays.

4. Skier Assessment

The skier assessment is meant for you to gather as much information as possible about the skier you are going to guide to make the experience the safest possible for both of you.

1. **Get the prior guide's report on skier:** If you are taking over after a guide, ask the guide which slopes they skied and how it went. It is important you get the previous guide's assessment of the skier's ability, physical limitations and any medical concerns. Ask veteran guides about the skier's abilities and tendencies.
2. **Introduce yourself:** Even though most of the times a skier will recognize your voice and know who you are, do not forget to introduce yourself to avoid any confusion. Let the skier know if you ski or snowboard, whether you are a new or an experienced guide, and whether you have any condition such as a headache or sore throat which could reduce your ability to guide or limit your endurance.
3. **Assess the skier's ability, physical limitations and medical concerns:** Before deciding which slopes to tackle, ask the skier about their skiing ability and the kind of slopes they prefer. It is also important to know how your skier is feeling to gauge the timing of breaks and to be alert to diminishing performance. Finally you want to know about any medical condition, such as diabetes, that may affect the skier's performance. Do not forget to monitor your skier's condition throughout the day to detect any signs of fatigue, dehydration, or inability to concentrate, that need to be addressed. Some skiers might have other physical impairments such as hearing limitations. Do not hesitate to ask your skier if their hearing is fine. For both your safety, you want to make sure that once on the slope your skier will hear you clearly and react timely to your commands. Do not hesitate to suggest that using a two-way headset communication may be helpful.
4. **Assess the skier's visual limitations, effect of light, shadows:** Ask your skier what they

can see and what they cannot see, as well as the effects of bright light and shadows on their vision. Assess the effects of going from bright lights to shadow and from shadow to bright lights. Some skier's eyes may adjust very slowly. Some visually impaired individuals see better in the dark and prefer night skiing. Have them give you as much detail as possible for you to understand the extent of their visual impairment. Do not hesitate to ask questions; no skier will get mad at you for wanting to comprehend their impairment and assure a safe skiing experience.

5. **Check equipment and clothing for temperature control and safety:** Make sure that your skier's skis and poles are in good condition, and that their boots are tight enough and properly secured into the ski bindings. Let the skier know if future maintenance will be needed on their equipment (Boot/binding/ski repairs, waxing/sharpening needed). For safety, make sure no piece of clothing presents a hazard while loading or unloading the chairlift (scarves, backpacks). Make sure your skier's clothing is appropriate for the weather to avoid getting too cold, too hot or wet. Check for face protection and gloves. Be prepared to lend your own pieces of clothing if necessary. Others in the group may have spare items to lend.
6. **Review commands/communication:** Your guiding technique may vary slightly from one skier to another, but it is important for safety reasons that both you and your skier communicate using standard keywords and methods. Ask your skier if they prefer to be guided from behind or to follow you. Review all keywords and make sure they are understood. Use ABSF standard language. Whenever non-standard language is used, there is the possibility of surprise. Surprise may result in a moment of indecision which could worsen a dangerous situation. If you have a suggestion for improved language, bring it to the attention of the Guide Training and Safety Committees for consideration.

5. Lift Loading and Unloading

5.1. Lift Loading

Prior to bringing your skier into the liftline, assess the lift loading area and loading conditions. Tell your skier what to expect throughout the process. This will reduce the stress of the skier and make the loading process go more smoothly. If the lift is noisy you may need to discuss these items at a distance from the lift.

1. **The lift type:** Magic carpet? T-bar? Chairlift? Is it an "old-fashioned-quick pick-up" or is it a "detachable-slow pick-up" lift? This will make a difference on the time you and your visually impaired skier have to get positioned for loading when your turn comes.
2. **The number of seats:** Is there a center pole? How many seats are there? Where will you sit on the chair – right, left, in the middle? Will other skiers be loading with you? Any snowboarders? Such details will increase the chances for a successful loading.
3. **Find out if your skier is familiar with the type of lift:** Did your skier already ride that lift before? Was he comfortable taking it or did he have any issues? Try to pinpoint what may have caused those issues. What can you do to improve the lift experience for the

skier? A prior bad experience with a chair lift should not rule out a much better experience now if you better prepare the skier.

4. **Before entering the liftline, place your skier on the side where they will be next to the lift operator (unless you are a snowboarder):** The lift operator will be able to assist by guiding the chair and ensuring a safe loading. (For snowboarders, depending on the set-up of your board, you may only be able to board on one side of your boarder while retaining the ability to assist them. This might make it a little trickier, but with a little training and experience you will be able to figure out your own safe way to board with any skier.
5. **Hold your skier's pole to guide them into and through the liftline and maintain oral communication:** As always, the more information you give your skier, the better. Let them know if the liftline curves or has a slope, and whether liftlines merge. Holding your skier's pole will allow them to feel and smoothly follow your movements without constant oral direction. Hold your skier's pole just below their handhold to easily lead them into the lift line, and continue to hold it until you reach the loading zone.
6. **Moving to the loading zone:** Proceeding from the waiting line to the loading zone always requires moving forward, but generally also requires re-alignment to the left or the right as waiting lines are often at an angle compared to the boarding position / chair path alignment. Therefore, it is important you let your skier know in advance if they must re-direct to the left or right to be properly aligned for boarding. A clock-face reference is usually used for this purpose. Keep your skier informed as you navigate to the waiting line telling them the distance still to go. Let him know "Two chairs back" (from the waiting line); "One chair back"; "We're on the waiting line" and finally "Let's go". If you believe it would be helpful, ask the lift operator to slow the chairlift. As you move to the pick-up line, continue to describe for the skier what you need him to do, e.g. "keep moving, 10 more feet, 5 more feet, a little to the left, turn to 11 o'clock." "Good. Stop." TIP: If things are not just right, let a chair or two pass to make sure guide and skier are in synch before moving out to the loading zone.
7. **Loading the Chair:** As the chair approaches check your skier's side-to-side alignment with the chair's path to assure you both are within the seating area of the chair and will avoid the outside frame of the chair and any center pole. When properly aligned with the chair path, release the skier's pole and remind them to hold their poles up out of the way to avoid getting the poles trapped under the approaching chair. Guide and skier should hold both poles in their outside hand, away from the body and high enough so they do not get stuck under the chair. Call "Chair in 3 – 2 – 1". Immediately after take-off, remind the skier to keep his ski tips up for those few seconds while you are still near the ground to avoid a catching a tip.
8. **Do not hesitate to report inadequate or un-timely responses from lift-operators:** For you, your skier's and other skiers' safety, it is important that lift operators stay alert and ready to respond to any emergency. If a lift operator didn't react as expected to a potentially dangerous situation, note the time and chair lift and ask the Trip Leader to report it to the management of the resort.

5.2. Lift Unloading

As you approach the top of the lift you will need to prepare the skier for a safe unloading, then quickly assess the unloading area to identify hazards and plan your exit to a safe area:

1. **Share your unloading zone exit plan, and notify your skier you are approaching the top:** Will you be able to go straight or turn as you exit the unloading area? Is there a steep backslope or will you need to push with your poles as soon as possible to clear the unloading area? Provide the skier with your planned exit – but be prepared to change your plan to avoid hazards, e.g. “When we get off at the top we’ll make a slow turn to the right.” As you approach the top, keep the skier informed so they can anticipate. For example: “We’re two chairs from the top. Ok - now one chair.” Hold your skier’s hand before, during and after unloading. Holding your skier’s hand will allow them to feel and follow your movements, and give you the greatest possible control to guide the skier around obstacles and other skiers as you unload and clear the unloading area. Guide and skier should hold both poles in their outside hand, away from the body and high enough so they do not get stuck under the chair.
2. **Before you unload, check for skiers/snowboarders standing by the exit:** A simple rule of thumb is to clear the landing area as soon as possible. Unfortunately many skiers don’t, and end up creating obstacles for you and your skier.
3. **Remind the skier to keep “Tips up” as you approach the touchdown zone, and countdown to your touchdown:** Make sure your skier has their tips up before they hit the ground, and call the landing. A best practice is to call out “Tips up! Touchdown in 3 -2-1! And stand UP!” The flat zone where you touchdown may be short or long. If it is lengthy flat area, standing up too soon may cause a problem by you getting pushed by the chair. It is best to stand up just as you near the top of the backslope, allowing you to gain speed quickly and glide away safely from the chair.
4. **Guide your skier through traffic to clear the landing zone:** Immediately guide your skier through the traffic away to a safe, flat area, out of the way of skiers unloading after you.
5. **Do not hesitate to report inadequate or un-timely responses from lift-operators:** If a lift operator didn’t react as expected to fallen skiers or squatters in the unloading zone or other dangers, note the time and chair lift and ask the Trip Leader to report it to the management of the resort.
6. **Make a stop at the top before proceeding downhill:** Assessing the slope below is critical before proceeding downhill. After unloading, proceed to an area where you can assess the slope below.

6. On the Hill

6.1. Know Terrain, Traffic, and Snow Conditions

Review the standard communication keywords (see section 9 – “crash” “stop” etc.) and ensure safe skiing conditions for you and your skier before proceeding downhill. A loud, calm and

confident voice inflection will allow your skier to hear you clearly and permit them to relax and enjoy the experience.

Check downhill to see how many skiers are present on the slope. Just like you did on the top of the hill, try to assess the skiers' abilities to be able to identify potential danger. Depending on how wide the slope is, you might want to delay your departure to allow some skiers to get sufficiently ahead of you.

At the crest of the slope, check how many skiers are ready to go, and try to assess their level of skiing by looking at the way they move. If there are too many skiers, do not hesitate to delay your departure. If skiers do not seem to be moving, do not hesitate to ask them if they are ready to go or if they wouldn't mind if you go first.

Do not forget to communicate to your skier what's going on and why you think it is safer for the two of you to wait a few seconds before proceeding.

Check the snow conditions. Let your skier know if the slope has been groomed or not, if it looks icy or powdery, and if some snow build-ups, moguls, rocks or bald patches are present. A detour to another slope may be necessitated.

Assess the terrain. Provide your skier with information so that they are able to mentally picture the slope. Describe the width of the slope, whether the pitch of the slope is steady, gets steeper or flatter, is undulating (roller-coaster), and whether there is a double fall-line (i.e. when the hill is sloped not only from top to bottom, but one side of the slope is higher than the other. A ball will roll off the side of a slope with a double fall-line before it gets to the bottom.).

6.2. On the Hill

Never leave your skier unattended on the slopes. For the safety of your skier, the safety of other skiers, and your own safety, never be in a hurry, and always wait for congested areas to clear. It is better to arrive late than risk a collision or injury! When guiding back to a lift, target an open area some distance from the liftline within which to stop your skier. Walk into the lift line from there.

Keep your skier centered in the slope, away from potential dangers such as bushes, trees, ravines, signs and other obstructions. Stay close to your skier to ensure his safety. If the distance between you and your skier is too great, other skiers may ski between you and create a hazard. It will also be more difficult for you to see hazards in the path of the skier such as icy or bare spots.

Maintaining a position directly uphill of the skier is considered the preferred position for a guide when "guiding from behind." (We use the term "guiding from behind" to refer to having the guide uphill / behind the skier, as opposed to those situations where a partially-sighted skier has

enough vision to follow a guide who leads the way downhill. See “Other Techniques.”) The uphill position helps protect your skier from any out-of-control skier coming from above, especially when traversing across a slope. It will require you to synchronize with your skier’s speed and turns. An added benefit is that by staying uphill of your skier and turning at the same time, you will always be looking in the direction the skier is moving, allowing you a better field of view of dangers in the skier’s path. If you simply follow in the skier’s tracks, you will lose the skier’s “field of view” and zone of danger (area forward of skier where they might collide with something) every time they turn back across the slope. Stay uphill and turn together! Pay particular attention to double fall lines or twisty trails. Your skier might become accustomed to a regular left – right – left – right... cadence and may not be ready for consecutive commands in the same direction. TIP: Practice your uphill guiding position even when not guiding by following a friend down the slope and mimicking their turns and speed.

Constant communication is essential, even if it is just an “OK” or “keep going”. Never spend more than a few seconds without talking to assure your skier you are there and keeping them safe. If your skier can’t or doesn’t hear you anymore, they might think something happened to you and that they are suddenly left on their own. If extended silence occurs, our skiers are trained to stop immediately, then reconnect with their guide before proceeding. Make sure you are communicating in an efficient way: avoid full sentences in favor of standard keywords that you learned in training and talk clearly and loudly if you are not using a headset or electronic communication system. Be aware of passing snowmobiles or loud lifts that may make you inaudible to your skier.

The guide’s position and proximity to a specific skier can be affected by several different factors you need to consider:

1. **The visual impairment of the skier:** Our skiers are generally guided “from behind” – guide located uphill of the skier, calling out terrain and turns, turning in synchronization with the skier. In such case, the guide should attempt to stay close enough to the skier to avoid other skiers passing between, to allow the skier to hear the oral commands of the guide, and to have the best view of hazards in the skier’s path.
2. **The skier’s speed:** Adapt your speed to your skier’s speed. Maintain a safe distance but not enough of a gap that would entice other skiers to cut between the two of you, potentially creating a dangerous situation and distracting your skier. A guide should not push their limits on speed. Guiding requires full concentration without having to worry about your own speed. Keep your skier’s speed within your own comfort zone. If guide or skier believes they are mismatched in terms of skiing speed, address the issue and consult with the trip chair about a possible alternative guide-skier matchup.
3. **Presence of other skiers:** In dealing with other skiers on the slopes, your powers of observation and quick assessment will be key. Are the other skiers present on the slope children, teenagers, young adults, adults or seniors? What is their level of skiing expertise? Are they skiers or snowboarders (bigger blindspot to the boarder’s backside)? Are they skiing alone, as a couple or as a group? If you are asking yourself all those questions and observe, you should be able to get the big picture of what’s happening on the slope and therefore be

able to safely guide your skier through some traffic. With more congestion on the slope, the guide will need to stay in closer proximity to the skier to avoid having other skiers cut between you and your skier. Again, if in doubt, simply stop and wait for more open space and a better opportunity to enjoy a stress-free ride down.

4. **Hearing ability of the skier:** Use a loud, clear, confident voice when guiding. Helmets, ears muffs, hoods or hats can interfere with communication. In addition, some skiers may have impaired hearing. You may also encounter loud chatter from an icy ski surface, loud ski lift machinery, and other skiers' shouts and screams. The two-way headset communication systems are a good solution to those noises and will insure a loud and clear communication. If you are not using a two-way headset communication system, maintain communication with your skier by staying as close as possible and using clear and loud commands. As stated before and for safety reasons, the basic rule for any skier who can't hear or understand commands clearly, is simply to stop to avoid unsafe situations. Use caution when using a headset: Because the skier can hear clearly from the speaker in their helmet, the skier is less likely to detect the location of and distance away from their guide. When listening through the headset, the guide always sounds like they are "right there" – in close proximity to the skier. As a result the skier may use less caution and may tend to ski away from their guide. Some guides may become less concerned with maintaining a good, close, uphill protective position vis-à-vis the skier. Do not let this helpful communication tool lull you into a less-than optimal guiding position.

6.3. Falls While Skiing

If you fall, do not panic. Quickly and as loudly as possible yell "I'm down – I'm down." Your skier should stop once they hear you, or alternatively should stop if they don't hear anything after a few seconds. Let your skier know where you are and if you are OK, if you lost your skis and need some time to gear up again, or if you are injured and need some help. If your skier has stopped in an unsafe location, give instruction to have him move sideways to a safer location. If that is not possible, tell the skier to hold their poles overhead pointing upward. This will allow uphill skiers to spot danger over a blind ridge or over the heads of other skiers in front of them.

Never rush when getting up from a fall as you may twist a knee trying to get your skis out from underneath you. If you are uninjured, proceed to retrieve all your equipment and move yourself and your skier to a safe place, visible from uphill, for you to gear up. If you are injured, but sufficiently mobile, warn uphill skiers by placing your two ski tails in the snow in the standing X pattern, and call Ski Patrol to assist you and your skier.

Always maintain a sufficient distance between you and your skier to avoid a collision if your skier should fall. If your skier falls, ask if they are injured, and warn them not to move if either of you think they may be injured. Moving an injured skier can cause additional injury. If the skier is injured, warn uphill skiers by placing your ski tails in the snow in the standing X

pattern. Call the Ski Patrol for help. Do NOT leave the skier to seek help. Send a passing skier for help if needed. Stay with your skier and keep him informed. Stop, assess the situation, think, then act. No good decision is made when in panic mode. Stop, take a deep breath, and take time to think before you act. Having the Ski Patrol's emergency phone number saved on your cell phone can be of great help. Be prepared and make sure you know who to call in case you or your skier gets injured or simply gets too tired and needs a ride down. It is always helpful to have an idea of your location when seeking assistance. Skiers' capabilities and endurance vary. To minimize falls, it is important that you stay alert and monitor your skier's strength, fatigue and medical conditions. Know when to say "no" for your skier's and your own safety; a 15 to 30 minute break will often do the trick.

6.4. Returning to the Lodge

Find a convenient spot to secure your and your skier's skis. Once you locate a ski rack location, describe with sufficient detail the location of the skis to enable the skier to retrieve their gear with a new guide. Give the skier as much location information as possible and make sure you remember it yourself. It is also a good practice to refresh the skier's recollection of the brand and color of their skis, or mark the shovels with orange tape. Sometimes leaving the bright orange "BLIND SKIER" bib over the skiers' skis will help the next guide locate the skier's skis. In any case, make sure you can lead the skier and their next guide to the location of the skier's skis. Make sure you bring your skier to the designated rendezvous point and that they meet with their next guide before you leave. At the end of the day help your skier return any rental equipment, and make sure that you and your skier return ABSF bright orange bibs to the Trip Leader.

7. Communication Keywords

When guiding a skier, use a loud, clear and confident voice. Never use long sentences - you don't have time for them. Stick with essential standardized keywords. Here is a list of commonly used keywords ABSF guides and skiers should be familiar. As with the language used for lift loading and unloading, we strongly encourage the use of standardized keywords by all skiers and guides so that when guide-skier pairings are changed, the skier can rest assured their new guide will be using the same familiar keywords. Non-standard language may cause confusion and delay in execution of a turn.

- Use clock reference:
 - "At 12 o'clock" = directly in front of skier.
 - "At 3 o'clock" / "turn to 3 o'clock" = on skier's right / turn to your right.
 - "At 6 o'clock" / "turn to 6 o'clock" = behind skier / turn around and face behind you.
 - "At 9 o'clock" / "turn to 9 o'clock" = on skier's left / turn to your left.

- State the direction of the turn first, then "turn" when you want the skier to actually initiate the turn. Some guides rhythmically call out "[direction] and turn" to create a

rhythm for the skier to set up their turn. By stating the direction first, you give the skier a second to “visualize” the turn and initiate the turn using proper technique:

- “Left [pause] turn” / “Right [pause] turn”.

- Specify the turn precision:

- “Right easy” – “Left easy” / “Right sharp” - “Left sharp”.

- Always keep talking so the skier knows they have not “lost” you:

- “Keep going” / “Good” / “OK” / “Slow down” / “Keep your speed up” / “Keep going across”.

- Describe terrain changes:

- “Getting steeper” / “Getting flatter” / “Bumps!” / “Little drop ahead”

- Describe snow conditions:

- “Icy” / “Powder” / “Built-up” or “mashed potatoes” / “Bald patch”.

- React quickly for danger:

- “Stop!” Best used after a “slow up” command.

- “Crash!” Used to tell the skier that danger is imminent and that he should execute a controlled sliding “fall” immediately.

8. Guiding Pitfalls

8.1. Lack of Anticipation

Always try to anticipate. Be prepared for the worse and ensure that you have enough time to react safely:

- Prepare your routing and be aware of travel times to be punctual.
- When walking, watch for objects lying on the floor or ground, and inform the skier of slippery or icy surfaces to prevent falls.
- When putting on or removing skis, or simply taking a short break, carefully choose an area out of the way of any traffic or potential dangers.
- Observe lift peculiarities you may need to deal with to ensure a safe loading.
- As you approach the top of the lift quickly assess the unloading area and modify your exit plan to ensure safe unloading.
- Watch for abrupt changes in snow conditions and slope pitch.
- Anticipate a target area where you will guide the skier in the next few turns.
- Observe other skiers’ movements and skill to assess potential danger.
- Observe other skiers’ paths and be ready for quick changes in their direction.
- Anticipate the need to slow quickly when approaching slope intersections and other heavy traffic areas.

- In case of a fall, take action to protect your skier from uphill skiers.
- Do not forget to note location of skis on ski racks.

8.2. Losing Focus Due to Distractions

There are many potential distractions a guide may need to ignore to stay focused on guiding:

- Noise from icy slopes, snow-making and ski lift machinery, other skiers' voices and shouts.
- Fallen or out of control skiers.
- Chatting on the lift with other skiers while approaching the lift unloading platform.

8.3. Inaudible Commands

Noisy surroundings can make it difficult for a skier to hear you. It is essential for you to be aware of those situations and give loud and clear commands at all times. For safety reasons, the basic rule for any skier who doesn't hear (or understand) commands clearly is simply to stop to avoid unsafe situations.

ABSF is equipped with a number of two-way headset communication systems which skiers and guides may use when available upon advanced request. Those devices make it much easier for the skier to hear you and reduce voice strain on the guide. They also allow the skier to talk back to you if necessary. However, the use of communication systems has revealed some potential problems with their use. Because the skier can now hear the guide loudly and clearly without any interference, their level of concentration may decrease while their level of confidence increases, unconsciously pushing them to ski ever faster, and possibly faster than the guide can react. Guide – skier pairings using headsets often tend to ski farther apart, raising the potential for another skier to ski between the pair and distract the guide or skier. Increased distance from the skier may also reduce the ability of the guide to spot potential hazards in the skier's path such as icy or bare patches, or skiers stopped below a ridge on the slope.

If the use of headsets is causing issues, stop and inform your skier that for safety reasons you feel more comfortable going back to non-amplified vocal communication. Ultimately, you must be the one who must decide whether use of headsets are a safe option. Safety first!

8.4. Not Talkative Enough

Silence can be very unnerving for a blind skier who suddenly doesn't know anymore what's going on in their environment. This is particularly true when it occurs while going down the slopes. It can suddenly generate insecure feelings and spoil the pleasure of skiing. It is essential for you to communicate every couple of seconds, even if it entails merely repeating the same command such as "good, good, good" or "keep going, keep going, keep going." A skier should NEVER presume that silence means to keep going. ABSF skiers are taught to stop if they do not hear their guide every few seconds.

8.5. Too Far Away from Skier

Being too far away from a skier can create multiple potential hazards: the skier will not be able

to hear you clearly if you are not wearing a communication system; you may not be able to see or judge potential hazards and their proximity that the skier will encounter, and you will not be in a good position to protect the skier from a collision with another skier. It is essential that you acquire and attempt to master the skill of being able to be the “uphill shadow” of the skier, staying in relatively close proximity to the skier and making your turns in synchronization with the skier.

8.6. Out of Condition / Practice

Skiing is a physical activity which necessitates being in good physical condition and having strong legs. It also requires regular practice to maintain good technique and ability. Guiding also requires good physical conditioning and good skiing technique. But it also requires you to learn and practice specialized guiding techniques. Continually refresh your guiding knowledge and skills to make sure you feel confident with your ability to safely guide skiers. Seek feedback from skiers and quality veteran guides to improve and to learn new techniques. Try to learn something from every guiding experience. To insure that guides and skiers are up to date with guiding techniques and do not get “rusty”, ABSF has mandated that guides and skiers participate in a guide and skier training clinic at least once every 2 years. Attending training every year will keep you up to date on the latest guiding techniques!

9. Other Techniques

There are other techniques available to guides that can be used in the right circumstances. We will briefly address them here. Each of these techniques present unique risks and require proper training in an advanced training clinic.

Guiding from the Front

This technique can be used with a skier who has sufficient vision to follow their guide at a safe distance. Use of this technique should be undertaken only after a thorough discussion with the skier. A guide experienced with this technique should be consulted to further discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this technique. The guide will ski in front of the skier and lead the skier down the slope. Guide and skier need to constantly adapt their speed and turns to insure that the skier is in visual contact with the guide at all time and close enough to the skier to avoid having other skiers pass between guide and skier, thus disrupting the flow of the guide-skier pairing. This requires a higher level of skiing ability for both guide and skier. Because of the guide’s position in front, oral communications are very difficult without the use of two-way headsets. This technique also requires the guide to regularly look over their shoulder to spot the skier and assess whether guide and skier proximity is appropriate. When

guiding from in front be sure to agree on visual clues you can use to signal your skier to slow or stop, such as extending your arms out to the sides, or crossing your arms overhead

Free-Skiing

Use of this technique should be undertaken only after a thorough discussion with the skier, and should be limited in use to wider, uncrowded slopes. This usually means its use is limited to trips to major mountain resorts. A guide experienced with this technique should be consulted to further discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this technique. This technique allows the skier the utmost freedom in their skiing. The guide will ski uphill of the skier, following the skier at close proximity to monitor the skier's progress downhill. However, the skier is given the freedom to turn when and how they wish, and to set their own speed. While "free skiing" the guide's role is to make sure that your skier stays centered in the middle of the slope and that your skier stays at a reasonable distance from other skiers to avoid any collision. The guide should remain in relatively close proximity to the skier; close enough to react with loud oral commands to keep the skier safely away from dangers. When a danger or risk arises the guide should immediately resume control by calling all turns and adjusting the skier's speed. Even when no danger is imminent and the skier is doing just fine on his own, the guide should continue to orally communicate with the skier every few seconds to assure the skier the guide is close by and monitoring their safety. Constant communication is essential, even if it is just an "OK" or "keep going".

Side by Side Guiding

Some slopes may have narrow passages between trees, and there may be short, narrow passages between slopes that are useful when navigating around the ski resort. Side-by-side guiding may be considered in such circumstances, but it can be a high risk undertaking. This technique involves skiing side by side with your skier with some connection point such as the guide holding the skier's pole just below the skier's handhold. The skier should be extending their arm out to the guide's side to keep a wider gap between the guide and skier and therefore lower the risk that guide and skier will collide or tangle skis. The connection point allows the guide to limit the ability of the skier to veer off-course. Side-by-side guiding is an acquired skill and should be learned under the guidance of a veteran guide who is practiced in this method and who can adequately inform you of the inherent risks. Practice of this technique should be done with an experienced guide, not a visually-impaired skier. The safest introduction to this technique is to use it from a dead stop and proceed only straight forward on shallow, short slopes. Any need to turn or slow greatly complicates this technique and increases the risk of its use. Turning or slowing necessarily widens your skiing "footprint" and can result in a collision between guide and skier, or crossed skis. Simply slowing in a wedge has in fact led to crossed (inside) ski tails, and a crossed-ski slideout with resulting injury.

Cat Walks and Mountain Roads

Occasionally you may encounter a “cat walk” or mountain road between slopes. A steep ravine may exist on alternating sides of the “cat walk.” Longer cat walks may get narrower, steeper or icy. Such situations make it nearly impossible for a guide to call and a skier to safely execute turns, and taking such a route should be considered only with extreme caution.

There are essentially three alternatives to deal with this type of situation.

Option one - Take another route or walk out. It may take more time or may make you late to a rendezvous. But it may absolutely be the right choice. If you cannot see to the end of the narrow passage or catwalk, and you have not skied it before (or don't remember it in its entirety), you don't know how steep, curvy, or treacherous and unforgiving it may be ahead. Runs change from day to day and even hour to hour depending on traffic, wind, sun, etc. Just because you and your skier made it through the passage earlier, it now may be icier and a lot faster and difficult to limit speed. Sometimes the right decision is to take another route or even walk out or down out of your predicament.

Option two - If your skier has enough sight and feels confident enough to be guided in such a narrow passage, then just slow way down and guide him as you would on a wider slope. The guide must have confidence that the skier can execute sharp turns to either side and quick stops before considering this option. Your margin of error is much smaller – a narrow path with trees and possibly steep drops on the side will require top-notch guiding as well as quick reaction by the skier. The default bail-out strategy is to ski into the side of the uphill. A fence, trees, or an impossibly steep, icy hillside may make this difficult. Extreme caution and slow skiing is essential.

Option three - In the right circumstances, a guide and skier may agree to the use of the side-by-side method of guiding. The guide will hold the skier's pole just below the skier's handhold, using it as a “joystick” to communicate direction and speed *in addition to* oral communication. The guide will slightly press the “joystick” forward to indicate the skier may go faster; pull slightly backward to indicate the need to slow down; push slightly right to indicate the need to go slightly to the right; and push slightly left to indicate the need to go slightly to the left. It is best to place your skier to the uphill side of the catwalk if possible. The guide will then act as a protective barrier between the skier and any drop off into a ravine. Note that any switchback will put the guide on the “wrong” side. Think twice before using this advanced technique and exercise great caution if you use it.

Slowing down while in a narrow passage in this side-by-side position generally requires a stem or snowplow by either the guide or both the guide and the skier. This can easily lead to the crossing of ski tails, which has led to injury. It is advisable to break off the side-by-side technique BEFORE you need to slow down or stop. Have an emergency stop plan in mind. Continually scan for a

“bail-out” exit path (generally up into the hillside) to use if danger is imminent.

10. Guide Criteria Checklist

A Good Guide:

1. Determines from a skier and other veteran guides the skier’s skiing ability, sight limitations, other disabilities, if any, and any special medical conditions before venturing onto the slopes. Understands the ramifications of disabilities and medical conditions.
2. Describes to skier the operation and layout of the chairlift and maneuvers the skier safely through a lift line and onto the lift.
3. Prepares the skier to safely disembark from the lift and can quickly alter the plan if a last-second potential danger exists.
4. Assesses any particular guiding preferences on the part of the skier and adapts accordingly, so long as it is safe to do so.
5. Describes to the skier the layout of the trail, its terrain and fall line, thereby enabling the skier to formulate an idea of what to expect.
6. Keeps skier as close to the middle of the trail as possible, except when an obstacle necessitates a need to alter from the center. At all times the guide keeps the skier away from the trail edges and trees, positioning himself between the skier and any obstacles as necessary.
7. Maintains proper spacing between guide and skier while maintaining a safe distance away from all other skiers on the trail.
8. Uses good judgment and responsibility on the slopes, including guiding in a conservative and safe manner. This includes knowing when to stop if traffic demands it and waiting until it is safe to resume.
9. Provides skier timely and sufficient notice as to what is approaching, i.e. terrain changes such as pitch, soft snow, ice patches, curves in the trail and additional traffic ahead.
10. Uses good voice inflection, making certain his voice carries sufficiently to be heard by the skier, including raising his voice enough or even shouting periodically if conditions require. Uses a confident tone of voice.
11. Communicates frequently, never allowing more than a few seconds of silence to pass. Checks often with the skier to ensure that guide can be heard and instructs the skier to stop if commands can no longer be heard and understood.

Both Guides and Skiers Need to Remember the Skier's Responsibility Code

1. Always stay in control and be able to stop or avoid other people or objects.
2. People ahead of you have the right of way. It is your responsibility to avoid them.
3. You must not stop where you obstruct a trail or are not visible from above.
4. Whenever starting downhill or merging into a trail, look uphill and yield to others.
5. Always use devices to help prevent runaway equipment.
6. Observe all posted signs and warnings. Keep off closed trails and out of closed areas.
7. Prior to using any lift, you must have the knowledge and ability to load, ride and unload safely.