A person and dog with leashes

Description automatically generated**Graduation Day**

Graduation is an exciting and emotional day for everyone.  This chapter will discuss what to expect throughout the day, during the ceremony, and afterward.  Your instructors have done this many times before, but every time is new and exciting with visitors and emotions running high.  Try to listen carefully to instructions and do your very best to be on time to help everything go off without a hitch.  If you have family or friends that would like to watch from home, the graduation ceremony is streamed live on Zoom and will be archived on the Guiding Eyes web site for you to view and share later.

The schedule for the day will look something like this:

The morning routine will be the same. You will have time to work and pack in the morning.

12:00pm Lunch

1:00pm Group playtime

2:45pm park time

3-3:30pm Meet your raisers! This will be one on one time between you, your raiser(s), and your dog in a private location

3:45pm Feed, Water, and Park

4pm Graduation Ceremony

5:00-6:00pm-Dinner for Grads and Raisers

Things to know:

Your family is invited to attend the ceremony. Aside from your puppy raisers and family, there will be Guiding Eyes staff attending the ceremony as well.

A 10-minute portion of our ceremony is given to graduates to fill however you would want. Graduates should decide as a group how you would like to represent yourselves.  Many classes choose to have each graduate say a few words or 1-2 graduate speakers. For example, you could choose someone to represent the first-time guide dog users and someone to represent the returning graduates. The time is given over to you so you may make the ceremony your own. However, nothing religious or political should be included in the ceremony.

Here are some suggestions for crafting an inspirational graduation speech:

* Relate an important life milestone that brought you to Guiding Eyes.
  + Share some previous life accomplishments and any hopes or dreams for your life with your new guide dog.
* Think about what you might be able to achieve now, that you might not have been able to before.
* How has your experience at Guiding Eyes affected your life for the better?

Guiding Eyes’ team of over 1500 volunteers and even more numerous donors make it possible for us to place 150 guide dogs each year.  It is our hope that people leaving graduation are inspired by what they’ve heard - and motivated to continue to make a difference for our future students.

**A few more things to keep in mind as you start thinking about graduation:**

Our puppy raising regions extend from Maine to North Carolina and west to Ohio, as well as a satellite region in Colorado. Many puppy raisers drive a long way just to meet you and see their puppy for what could be the last time in person.  For many, this event provides some closure, but they also come to celebrate you as a team which in turn reinforces the sacrifices and love spent getting this puppy here to this one very important day. Though you may have friends and family coming to see you as well, please plan to spend time with your puppy raisers. Many of them will have put together a gift or photo album for you. They may only be able to be here for a short time before turning around and heading home. They will all have stories for you of your dog from their puppyhood. Remember, these are “puppy” stories and may be no more relevant to the adult dog you have now than the stories your parents tell about you as a toddler.

Puppy raisers may also gift you with photo books, toys, or other keepsakes that you should accept graciously.  If you find that you have received a toy or treat that you feel is not appropriate, simply consult with your placement specialists later to decide if they are safe or not. 