



Tips for Interacting with People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

Guiding:

- Offer to guide a person who is visually impaired by asking if they would like assistance. Offer them your arm. Respect the desires of the person you are with. Remember: The person with vision loss is the best one to tell you how to help.
- Allow them to take your arm just above the elbow. Walk ahead of the person you are guiding. Never grab a person who is blind or visually impaired by the arm and push him/her forward.
- If coming to a narrow space, pull elbow slightly toward your back to signal them to move behind you.
- Use words to tell what is coming, such as “steps up” or “the door opens toward you and to the left.”
- When taking the person to a car or bus, guide their hand to the door handle and/or the roof if the door is already open.
- Do not leave a person who is blind or visually impaired standing in "free space". Always be sure that the person you guide is touching a chair or a wall if you have to be separated momentarily.
- Guide dogs are working mobility tools. Do not pet them, feed them, or distract them while they are working.
- Never leave a door open or rearrange furniture without telling the person.

Conversation:

- Introduce yourself, do not play the “guessing game.”
- Speak directly to the person, not through their companion, guide, or other individual. Use a natural conversational tone and speed.
- Address persons who are totally blind or visually impaired by name when possible. This is especially important in crowded areas.
- Indicate to the person that you are leaving to avoid the embarrassment of them speaking when no one is actually there.



- Feel free to use words that refer to vision during the course of conversations. Vision-oriented words such as "look," "see," and "watching TV" are a part of everyday verbal communication. The words "blind" and "visually impaired" are also acceptable in conversation.
- Be precise and thorough when you describe people, places, or things. Don't leave things out, or change a description because you think it is unimportant or unpleasant.
- Use descriptive language. Making reference to colors, patterns, designs, and shapes is perfectly acceptable.
- Use the clock method. Give a sense of direction through telling where items are in reference to a clock face, (e.g. "your drink is at one o'clock and the salt is at twelve o'clock.") Give clear and concise directions. Use words like right and left in reference to them, not you.
- Offer to read written language. (menu, merchandise labels)
- Speak about a person with a disability by first referring to the person and then to the disability. You should, therefore, refer to persons who are blind rather than to blind persons.
- If there is a money transaction, name each bill so that he/she can fold it according to the individual's own method for identification.