

What to Do When You Meet a Blind Person

Every person is unique and therefore reacts in a unique way to blindness or visual impairment. A person who is blind and visually impaired whether totally blind or has some degree of useful vision may, at times, require assistance. Do not assume that this person does not know how to do something until you have asked them about it. Visual impairment can take many forms; some people can see well enough to read yet their vision does not allow them the ability to identify a face or find their way around a parking lot. Almost all persons who are visually impaired have difficulty adapting to lighting changes. Going in and out of buildings or shadows can momentarily increase their impairment.

- **What do I do if a person has a dog guide?**

The dog is a working dog, not a pet. Do not divert or distract the dog, or it could be unsafe for the handler. When giving directions, deal directly with the person, not the dog.

- **What do I do if I eat with a person who is blind in the restaurant?**

It is helpful to identify what is on the table, i.e., "The water glass is to your right, the salt is to the left of your dinner plate,". Offer to read the menu. Don't assume all visually impaired people can read braille in such a fluent way to handle a complicated menu. Offer to orient the person to the items on the plate, "The meat is at the top of the plate, the rice to the right and the string beans on the left,"

- **When entering or leaving a room or area announce yourself and your name. "Hi Ann, it's Mary," or "It's Mary, I am leaving now,".**

Talk directly to the individual and introduce anyone else, including children or other service dogs or pets.

- When helping with describing surroundings, like a room, be brief and descriptive. Use the words, "right", "left" and "ahead" and "behind". For example, "Ann, you are facing the table, a chair is a few steps ahead and to your right,".

“over there” and “that way” is useless to a person who cannot see.

- When guiding someone to a chair, ask if the person wants you to place their hand on it, or tap it out.
- **How do I help guide a person who is blind?**

Avoid pulling the person by the hand or tugging at their sleeves. They will hold your arm just above the elbow. The individual stands next to the sighted guide and one-half step behind. The sighted guide's arm is relaxed and down at his/her side. The motion of your body will tell them what to do. Set a comfortable pace for both of you. Let them know when you are coming to a curb and whether you will be stepping up or down. When the terrain is irregular, alert the person in advance, e.g. stepping from concrete to grass, concrete to gravel, etc. Try to give specific information, but only as much as needed - too much information can be confusing.

- **What do I do if we come to a doorway?**

You should tell the person when they are approaching a door and in which direction the door opens. For example, say, "The door opens to the left and towards us". In this case, the person would then free their left hand in order to hold the door and to close it.

- **How do we maneuver on the stairs?**

Say, "We are going to walk up or down stairs". Stairs are approached squarely, never at an angle. Come to a full stop before the stairs. If possible, the person takes hold of the handrail and finds the first step, steps down or up one step and then both proceed together in rhythm, the sighted guide always one step ahead. Stop at the end of the stairs and also say, "Last step".