

Do's and Don'ts When Interacting with a Person who is Blind

When speaking with a person who is Blind:

- DO identify yourself, especially when entering or leaving a room. Don't say, "Do you know who this is?"
- DO announce when you are leaving the room.
- DO introduce the person to anyone else present, including children.
- DO speak directly to the individual. Do not speak through a companion. Unless they are hard of hearing, they can speak for themselves.
- DO give specific directions like, "The desk is five feet to your right," as opposed to saying, "The desk is over there."
- DO ask if you can touch their hand to guide them to a chair, do describe the type of chair (folding chair, has arm rests etc.)
- DO give a clear word picture when describing things to an individual with vision loss. Include details such as color, texture, shape, and landmarks.
- DO touch them on the arm or use their name when addressing them. This lets them know you are speaking to them, and not someone else in the room.
- DON'T shout when you speak. They can't see but often have fine hearing.
- DON'T be afraid to use words like "blind," "look," or "see." Their eyes may not work, but it is still, "Nice to see you." Words like look or see are a natural part of our conversation. It is very difficult to avoid them in our speech. What comes naturally is encouraged.

If a Blind person asks you for directions:

- DO use words such as "straight ahead," "turn left," "on your right."
- DON'T point and say, "Go that way," or "It's over there."

General guidelines:

- DO treat Blind people as individuals. People with visual disabilities come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. They each have their own strengths and weaknesses, just like everyone else.

How can I best act with a visually impaired person?

Be natural, be yourself and show warmth and sincerity, as you would with anyone else. A visually impaired person just does not see as well and may need more explanations. Ask what would be helpful to them when you are together.

Don't be afraid to ask.

Visual impairment can vary from total lack of usable vision to vision nearly as good as yours under the right circumstances. Some visually impaired people can see quite well in good lighting but become totally blind in dim lighting. Other visually impaired people can see

well in dim lighting but can't see in bright light. Almost all visually impaired people have difficulty adapting to lighting changes. Going in and out of buildings or shadows can momentarily increase their impairment. If you don't know how much assistance a person needs ask, "Would you like to take my arm?" or "Will you need assistance in...."

Is it okay to talk about a person's visual impairment?

Visual impairment can take many forms that may be confusing to you. Some people can see well enough to read yet can't find their way around a parking lot. Some visually impaired people seem to see perfectly well until they suddenly walk into a pole. It is all right to ask them about their impairment. Most visually impaired people welcome the opportunity to help others understand vision loss better. Those who don't like to talk about their condition or are bored with the topic will soon let you know by the tone or brevity of their answers.

How do I best talk with a visually impaired person?

Always talk directly to him/her (not through a companion, if present). There is no need to raise your voice. Use normal, natural expressions. Find common interests. He/she watches TV, visits friends and goes places. Almost any activity can be adaptive so the person may well enjoy Scrabble, crafts, or playing a sport. Try to keep the discussion light.

Hints to help direct or orient him/her to new surroundings:

Be brief and descriptive. Proceed in order. Start with the scene directly facing the person, and then proceed by saying what is to the right, behind and to the left. Use right or left according to the way he/she is facing. Establish a point of contact when leaving their immediate presence. Do not leave them standing in free space.

Many visually impaired people live alone and do many things in their residence.

Please remember, Visually impaired people live independently - either alone, with a housemate or with their families. The use of aids and adaptive appliances are taught to them by the professional staff at the New Hampshire Organization for the Blind. These help with everyday tasks such as cooking, washing clothes, sewing, etc.