

Tips and Techniques...

When Working With Someone with Reduced Vision

Common Courtesy

Introduce yourself. Not everyone recognizes voices or remembers them. For example, “Hi John, it’s Cathy.”

Don’t shout. People who are visually impaired or blind do not necessarily have a hearing impairment.

Speak directly to the person who is visually impaired or blind.

Don’t avoid visual language such as “see” or “look”. People who are visually impaired or blind are not offended by these words and understand that these words are part of normal conversation.

Don’t rely solely on hand gestures when talking. A person who is blind can’t see waving or pointing hands.

Tell a person who is visually impaired or blind when you are leaving the room. Also inform the person when someone new has joined the group.

Tell a person who is blind or visually impaired when photos are being taken.

Safety

Don’t push, pull or grab someone who is visually impaired or blind. Always inform the person before touching him or her. Offer your arm for assistance.

Don’t leave a person who is visually impaired or blind standing in open space. Direct the person to a chair, the wall or another item of furniture which can be used as a point of reference and to improve balance.

Don’t move personal items or rearrange furniture of a person who is visually impaired or blind. The person may be using an organizational system to identify or distinguish items.

Don’t leave cabinets or doors partially open. This is a safety hazard and can result in injuries.

Don’t have loose cords, throw rugs, or other items on the floor in areas of travel that might cause the person to trip or fall.

Provide support and encourage independence

Use the clock method when describing the location of something to a visually impaired or blind person. This works on a small scale to describe food placement on a plate. It also works on a larger scale to orient someone to a new location or room.

Be supportive of new skills that a person who is visually impaired or blind has learned.

Encourage the use of adaptive equipment and optical devices. These items promote safety and independence

Have each person in a group or meeting state their name so that the person who is blind or visually impaired is able to identify the name, know the general location of the individual and possibly put a voice to a name for automatic recognition.

Understand how vision works

More light is not always better. More light may cause glare which can reduce vision.

Vision can fluctuate due to lighting, changes in health and fatigue.

Encourage the use of prescribed optical devices, sun visors and sunglasses.

High contrast, like white on black or black on white, may make objects and shapes more visible to individuals with low vision. Put dark food on a white plate and white food on a dark plate. Set the plate on a contrasting placemat to better see where the edge of the plate is.

Travel techniques

Guide a person by offering to have them hold your arm just above the elbow. This allows the guide to be one step ahead of the person being guided.

A long cane / white cane is a mobility tool that can identify someone as visually impaired or blind and it is a tool to preview the environment and detect surface changes or obstacles allowing the person to travel safely and independently.

Dog guides are working service animals.

- **Don't distract the dog** by touching, petting, motioning, making eye contact with or calling to the dog. This can make the team unsafe.