

Courtesy Guide for Persons with Sight

When with a Person who is Visually Impaired

1. If you wish to offer assistance, ask the person first. They may not require assistance and/or may wish to be independent with the situation.
2. Identify yourself each time you meet the person and introduce all guests by name.
3. Announce yourself when you enter or leave a room. Do the same when beginning or ending a conversation so the person does not continue to speak after you leave the room.
4. Speak in a normal voice unless you know the person has a hearing impairment.
5. Speak directly to the person rather than through a companion.
6. It is fine to use words like "look" or "see" as well as other words that refer to vision (colors, patterns, designs, and shape) during the course of a conversation. The words blind and visually impaired are also acceptable in conversation.
7. To shake hands with the person, just say, "I'd like to shake your hand," and they can extend theirs out to you.
8. When dining out, offer to read the menu. If the person requests additional assistance, the use of a 'clock face' as a reference system can be helpful in describing the positions of food on a plate, things on a table and in the room.
9. To be a Sighted Guide, allow the person to take your arm just above the elbow. This allows the person to follow your body movements. If you come to steps, curbs or other obstacles, identify them. In places too narrow to walk side by side, bring your arm back behind you and let the person follow in single file. Walk at a comfortable pace.

When giving directions, be clear and concise. Avoid saying "Over here/there", etc. Mention obstacles in the direct path of travel. Be sure you are facing the same direction as the person so left/right references are accurate. If you are unsure how to give directions, say something like "How should I describe things?"

10. If you must leave the person alone, find a wall or piece of furniture, etc. for them to stand near rather than being left alone in an open space. This allows the person to maintain environment orientation and travel direction.
11. When approaching a chair, extend your guiding arm to the chair. The person can follow down your arm to seat themselves.
12. Avoid unnecessary touching. Always ask the person if they need assistance before touching them. If you are going to touch the person, explain what you are doing first.
13. Do not move furniture or frequently accessed items without letting the person know.
14. When a guide dog has its harness on, the dog is working and should not be distracted, talked to or petted. Do not call the dog by its name. Distracting a guide dog could compromise the person's safety.
15. The following items can be hazardous to a person with impaired vision -
 - Half open doors
 - Chairs that are not pushed in
 - Open cabinet drawers
 - Loose rugs
 - Cords that stretch across walking areas
 - Hanging plants or lamps near walking areas
16. "People First" language is preferred. Speak about a person with a disability by first referring to the person and then to the disability, e.g., "persons who are blind" rather than "blind persons."
17. Have the same expectations for a visually impaired person as you would for anyone else. Allow the person to tell you when assistance would be appreciated. A person who is visually impaired doing everyday things is just like everyone else ~ not 'amazing'.

***Please contact NABA for further information and
community education programs about vision loss.***

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