



Older Individuals who are Blind – Technical Assistance Center

Lighthouse for the Visually Impaired and Blind
Port Richey, Florida

Basic Information for Working with a
Person Who is Visually Impaired or Blind

- Visual impairment is not always obvious. Visual conditions causing impaired vision present in many different ways, including blurry vision, significant glare issues, loss of central vision, peripheral field loss, and blind spots. People may “seem” to see some things fine and not see others at all.
- If you see a person who is visually impaired who seems to need help, offer your services. Identify yourself and let him know you are talking to him. Do not be misled. Before you decide a person who is blind or visually impaired is “confused,” be sure it is not due only to lack of orientation. They might just need information about where they are.
- Always address the person who is visually impaired directly (using their name so they know you are speaking to them), and use a normal tone and speed of voice.
- When you enter the presence of a person who is blind or visually impaired, identify yourself. When you are ready to leave, tell them you are leaving. In a group, address a blind person by name if they are expected to reply.
- When approaching a person who you suspect needs help in getting from one place to another, ask if help is needed. If help is desired, offer your arm so they can grasp your elbow. This position offers the greatest amount of information and security. Do NOT take their arm and propel them by the elbow. When walking with a person who is visually impaired, proceed at a nominal pace. You may notify them verbally or hesitate slightly before stepping up or down.
- When accompanying a person who is blind or visually impaired into an unfamiliar room, never leave them standing alone in the middle of the floor. Escort them to a seat or place their hand on a “point of reference” such as a wall or table or chair.
- Do not be over-protective. The person who is visually impaired should do as much as he can by and for himself.

- When giving directions, do not point. Try to be as specific as possible. For example, use directional terms (not “over there”).
- When serving food to a person who is visually impaired. As you place each item on the table call their attention to it, and describe the location of each item. The clock method works well. For example, “your water is at 10 o’clock above your plate.” If they want you to cut their food or serve it from a casserole or platter, they will request that help.
- When giving change/money to a person who is visually impaired, identify the denominations being given. Coins can be identified by touch. Help the individual (if asked) to organize their money.
- Never move items around without first informing the individual who is blind. Persons who are visually impaired rely on memory and organization for maintaining their personal areas and knowing where things are located.
- Words like “look,” “see,” and “blind” should be used without embarrassment with persons who are visually impaired.
- People who are visually impaired and blind can do many tasks/jobs with the right accommodations. Specifically, if a person has done a task/job in the past they likely have muscle memory and ingrained skills. Modifications are often simple and inexpensive.