

Blind Mobility

Assisting Individuals With Visual Impairments

Orientation, Mobility and Sighted-Guide Techniques

- Individuals living with a visual impairment need special thoughtfulness and care in order to learn about and explore their world, as well as to accomplish daily tasks.*
- While visual impairments do add challenges to an individual's daily life, individuals who are blind or visually impaired are able and should be encouraged to be as independent as possible.*
- This session is designed to both raise your awareness of the special needs associated with visual impairments and instruct you in the appropriate methods for assisting individuals with visual impairments.*

Assisting Individual with Visual Impairments (cont.)

- *We will discuss how to communicate with a blind individual, how to assist with daily activities, and how to assist with mobility.*
- *We will use role plays to give you the opportunity to experience a little bit of what it must be like to be blind, as well as how to appropriately utilize the sighted-guide techniques that we will be discussing.*

Goals in Working with Individuals Who are Blind or Visually Impaired

1. Be sensitive to blind or visually impaired individuals' special needs.

If someone has a vision impairment, he/she may also have:

- *A fear of travel*
- *A fear of falling*
- *A fear of steps*
- *A fear of bumping into objects and people*
- *A fear of crowds*
- *Reduced feeling of self-esteem*



Goals (cont.)

2. Talk to them constantly—describe and explain the individual's surroundings and what is happening around them.
- *The human voice introduces contact. Even though words may not be understood, the sounds and your tone establish a relationship, letting them know that they are “part of the action”.*
 - *Be as descriptive as possible; explaining sounds, smells, colors, etc. They may learn to concentrate on these clues to understand what is going on and to learn more about their surroundings.*

Goals (cont.)

- *Address the individual by name when entering the room, even if you are just passing through. It will reinforce a sense of human contact and acknowledge their presence. Also, using the person's name lets them know that you are talking to them, not to someone else who happens to be nearby.*
- *As soon as a person who is blind enters a room, greet them by name to let them know that you are there. If you are escorting the individual, tell them who is in the room that they are entering.*
- *Let the person know when you are leaving or moving to another part of the room so that they do not try to speak to you when you are not there.*

Goals (cont.)

- *Touch the person's hand gently, present an object and explain to them what you are doing. This guards against them thinking that things appear from and disappear into no where.*
- *Introduce objects and tasks the "hands on" way. For example: Show them how to touch the food on their tray; where it is positioned and how to open the containers. Introduce objects this way, and ask them to describe it, if possible. The person may show physical defensiveness, so go gently.*



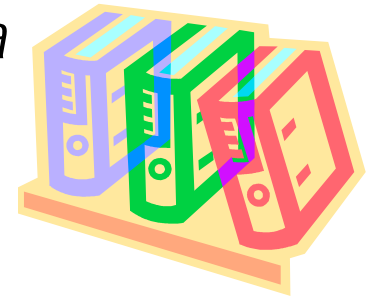
Goals (cont.)

- ❑ *Describe the parts of the body and clothing as you assist the individual with dressing, bathing and positioning. Let them FEEL and become aware of their image.*
- ❑ *Describe the room and changing surroundings. Describe the route so the person can walk with clues, such as sound and smells along the way. The person who is blind develops space perception through mobility.*
- ❑ *Explain what you are doing. Tell them that you are pouring water, taking a pulse, or writing on the chart. They may become aware of patterns and may start to understand what is going on at certain times. This will reduce some fear of the unknown.*

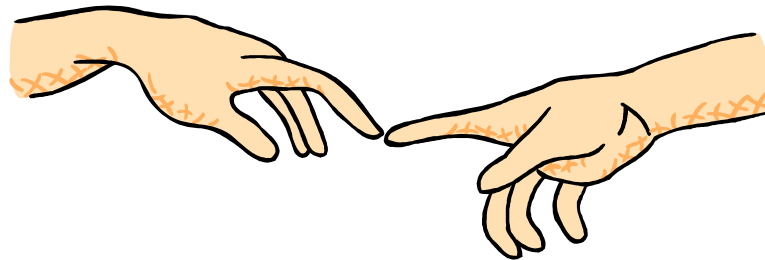


Goals (cont.)

- ❑ **Be Specific.** Think “non-visually” before describing something or giving directions to an individual who is blind, i.e., Say “It’s on the **RIGHT SIDE** of the **TOP** shelf” instead of “Its over there on the shelf”; Say “Do you want a glass of apple juice?” instead of “Do you want some of this?”
- ❑ **Explain events and describe unfamiliar surroundings,** even if they don’t understand. You should discuss the activity in a pleasant tone of voice and if they are in a new surrounding, explain what to expect. Your personal involvement can be reassuring and comforting to them.



- *Give plenty of positive physical contact. A pat on the back, a gentle touch of the hand can show them everything is all right. The person can't see glances of approval, concern in your eyes, etc. Physical contact, verbal explanations and verbal praise must be used.*



Encourage Independence

- ❑ *Remember that every individual must be encouraged to perform tasks according to his/her ability level, with the least amount of assistance necessary.*
- ❑ *Individuals with visual impairment are no different. They may need some special assistance with descriptions and directions but are still able to perform tasks.*
- ❑ *Imagine how much you would be able to do with your eyes closed or in a blackout with no flashlight...if you couldn't see, would you still be able to do some things for yourself? If you walked into your bathroom and then closed your eyes, would you still be able to brush your own teeth? What type of assistance would make this task easier for you?*

Assist Individuals with Mobility

- ❑ *All people desire to know what goes on around them. For an individual with a visual impairment, mobility increases their curiosity and allows them to learn about their environment.*
- ❑ *When you constantly and consistently give them descriptive information about their surroundings and activities, it puts meaning to their world and helps them establish their position in the environment. (This is called Orientation)*

Assisting Individuals

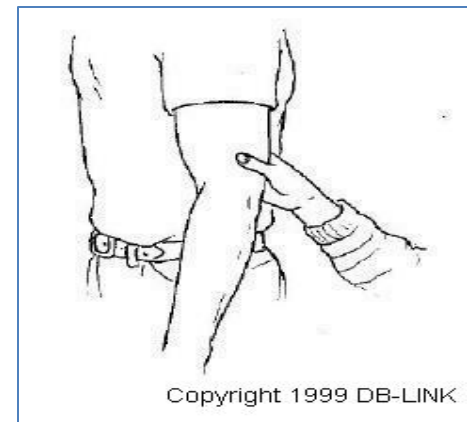
- *Part of our job responsibilities is to provide mobility and orientation. That is why it is important to learn these basic techniques. We must assist the person who is visually impaired with safe travel in order to increase their mobility and become more familiar with their environment.*

Techniques for Independent Travel—Role Plays

- Sighted-Guide Technique:
- *You approach the individual by first speaking to him/her to initiate contact*
- *Touch is very important, but NEVER touch an individual without speaking to them first*
- *Ask the individual which side they would like you to stand on, if they have a preference, or stand on the individual's non-dominant side*

Techniques (cont.)

- When the individual is ready, they will hold the guide's arm with their non-dominant hand just above the elbow, with the thumb on the outside.



- NOTE: This is the only correct grasping technique. It is not appropriate to hold the individual's hand or grasp their arm, unless they are physically unable to maintain a grasp of your arm.

Techniques (cont.)

- Guide the individual as they walk ½-1 step behind you. You will not walk along side each other and you will not pull them. Walk at a pace that is comfortable for the individual.
- Always pause when you change directions, step up or step down.
- As you walk, talk to the individual. Tell them where they are going and describe the surroundings along the way. Explain what they are hearing and smelling.
- When you are acting as a guide, never leave the person in “free space”. Be sure the individual is in contact with a wall, railing or some other stable object until you return.

Narrow Passages

i.e., Doorways or Hallways When Passing

- When approaching a narrow passage, explain to the individual what is coming up, i.e., “we’re going to walk through a door in a few seconds”, or “There is someone coming down the hall the other way. I will guide you to walk behind me so we are able to get by”.
- When you get to a narrow passage, pull your guide arm behind your back so the individual will step behind you as you walk through the narrow passage.
- The individual may slide their hand down and grab you at the wrist. After pass through the narrow area, make sure you return to the correct position for walking.

Steps

- Always pause before ascending or descending steps and let the individual know what you're doing
- Always make sure the steps have a railing and that the individual uses the railing
- Once the individual is holding onto the railing, the guide will begin up (or down) the steps
- As the guide is about to approach the second step, the individual will start up (or down) the steps, walking ½-1 step behind the guide

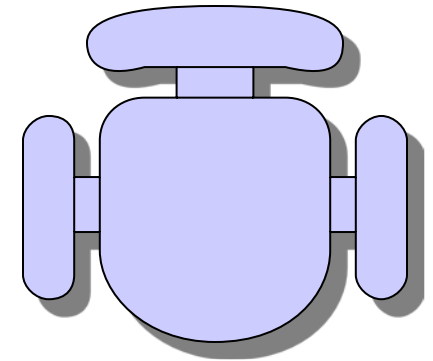


Steps (cont.)

- It is important for them to be close enough to feel your body movement and to walk up at a normal pace - **do not** take one step at a time
- Give instructions and tell the individual when they are on the last step
- The individual should be positioned between you and the handrail. If he/she begins to lose their balance, immediately exert force in the opposite direction to offset the movement, while bracing your hand across the person's body to break the fall.

Seating

- When seating the individual to a chair, place his/her hand on the arm of the chair and allow him/her feel the chair and to seat himself/herself, if possible
- Help the individual to align his/herself in front of the chair
- Tell the individual that the chair is in front of him/her; while bending his/her knees, he/she quickly checks the seat with the back of his/her hand, making a single circular motion, to ensure that he/she is not about to sit on anything but the chair



Role Play

- Experience being blind

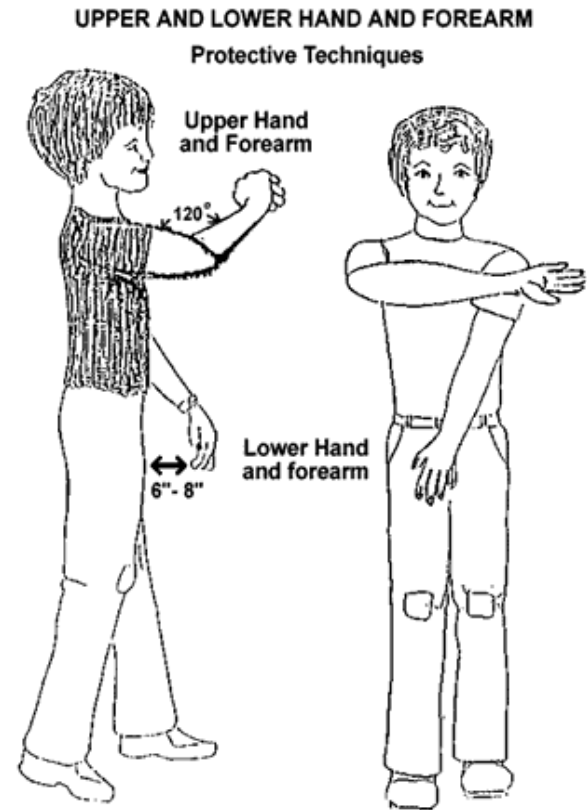
Feelings

- How did it feel to be “blind” for a few minutes?
- Did your guide explain what was happening and where you were going?
- How well did your guide make you feel safe?
- Was anything confusing or frightening during your journey?
- While you were walking, did you know where you were in the building?

- Upper and Lower Hand and Forearm - This technique can be very useful for individuals who travel the hallways to avoid walking into wheelchairs and other obstacles.
 - The individual's left hand is placed up in front of their face, palm and forearm out. (upper body) it protects the head and eyes from injury.
 - The individual's right hand is extended out, straight in front of him, palm down and fingers cupped. (Lower body) it protects them from bumping their shins, waist, knees, etc.

Upper and lower body techniques can be used together. Many blind people just use the upper body technique. This technique is sometimes modified. Arms may be held at approximately shoulder height (or higher); one hand may clasp the other with palms facing outward and forward.

Protective Technique



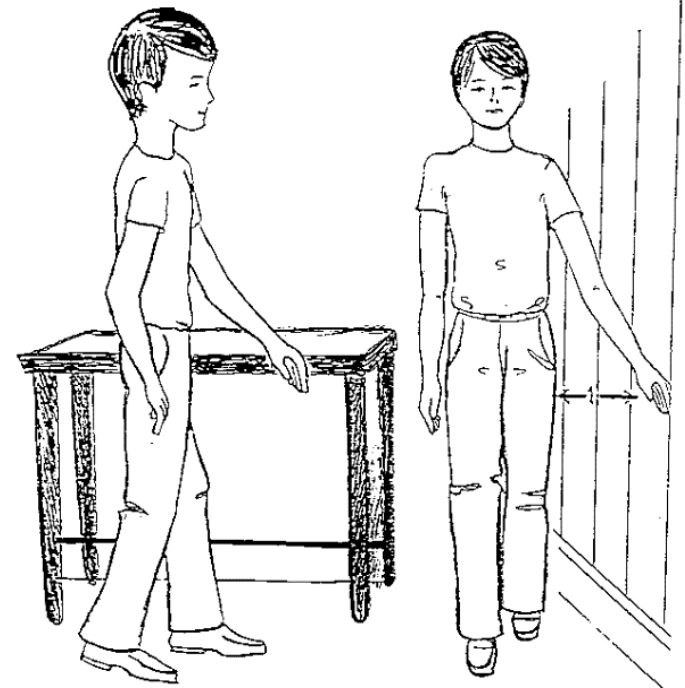
- A person who is blind may be able to travel by feeling the side of walls as he/she walks. This is called trailing.

- The individual should trail the wall to the right (or towards his/her dominant hand)
- The back of the hand, i.e. the little and ring fingers, should trail the wall with the fingers slightly curled.
- The trailing hand must be extended ahead of his/her body so that his/her hand will make contact with an obstacle before his/her body does.
- The trailing should be approximately hip height. Trailing this way can help them locate railings.
- Modifications may have to be made, to suit the individual's capabilities.

Trailing

SIDE VIEW TRAILING TABLE

FRONT VIEW TRAILING WALL



Squaring Off

- Squaring-off is a technique that can be used when a person who is blind needs to walk across an open area, so they will move in a straight line, from point A to point B.
- The person places his shoulders and heels against a wall to align himself.
- As the person walks across, he/she should use a protective technique.
- You may want to be at point B, and call them by name so they will keep walking in the correct direction.

Cane Usage



- If a resident uses a CANE, make sure they “sweep” the cane from side to side as they walk.
- See that they keep the cane close to the floor, so the cane will let them know they are close to the obstacle.
- This will keep the resident from bumping into or tripping over things.
- If a resident does not use a cane, you may want to encourage them to use a protective technique.



Wheelchair Usage

- Escorting Individuals:
- When escorting an individual who is visually impaired and using a wheelchair, be sure to explain where you are going and warn them before you start moving.
- It can be very startling to suddenly find themselves moving without knowing what is happening.
- Describe the surroundings to the individual just as you would with someone who is ambulatory.
- Also be aware of bumps and turns along the way and tell the individual what is happening.

Wheelchair Usage (cont.)



- Individuals who propel their own wheelchair:
- A visually impaired individual who propels their own chair without special assistance.
- Encourage the individual by praising efforts and accomplishments but never assume that an individual cannot propel their own chair just because they have visual impairment.
- Assist the individual by positioning the chair in a straight position so that they are ready to move forward.
- If they are not able to correct their position themselves, give verbal prompts to help them in the right direction

Assisting With Meals

- As with any task, never assume that a blind individual cannot feed themselves, but they may need some special assistance in order to be independent.
- Be as descriptive as possible when explaining what food is being served. For example, don't just say, "Your having chicken, broccoli, and potatoes", but rather, "your having a baked boneless chicken breast, broccoli with cheddar cheese sauce and mashed potatoes".
- Also explain, and help the individual feel where everything is located, i.e., the plate, each item on the plate, their beverage, utensils, napkins, and condiments.

Meals (cont.)

- Ensure that everything that the individual will need for their meal is comfortably within reach and guide his/her hand to each item as you explain what it is.
- When explaining where each item of food is on their plate, you may utilize the clock method. Relate each item to the numbers on the face of a clock, i.e., broccoli at 12:00, chicken at 4:00 and potatoes at 8:00.
- If the individual is unable to comprehend the clock system or if his/her range of motion limits their ability to reach, set up the plate and eating area according to his/her unique needs.



Suggestions for Overcoming Some Common Problems

- **Transitions**: from one activity to another are often difficult for the person who is visually impaired. Preparing the person before the transition takes place might help them get used to the idea, even if they don't like it.
- Try to actively involve the person in the process so that they feel that they have control over the situation. During snack time say something like, "After we eat our crackers we're going to have music time, then we will watch or listen to a video." Before the last song you might remind them again, "After we sing, it'll be time to watch or listen to a movie".
- Taking things one step at a time seems to work best.



Overcoming Common Problems (cont.)

- Change, in general, seems to bother most individuals who are blind. This means giving-up something they know, and going into the unknown.
- Change alone can be frightening because they do not have the advantage of “seeing” what will happen next. Visual cues like someone entering a room, day turning to night, the look on a person’s face, are all things that non-sighted people miss out on in preparing them for what’s to come.

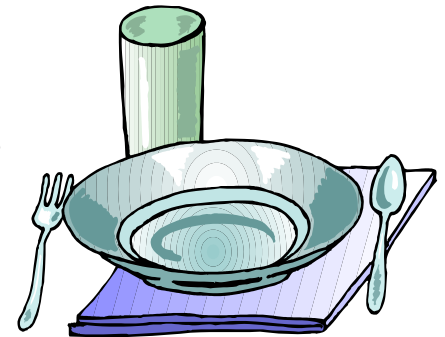
Overcoming Common Problems (cont.)

- **Uneasiness/Anxiety**, towards an event or task can be overcome by simply describing what a place will be like or what will happen. Knowing you are close by, “just in case” can also be reassuring.
- Be sure to tell them when you are leaving, where you’ll be, and when you’ll be back. When it comes time for them to be part of a larger group, let them know you will be with them. This may be all that is needed to put them at ease.
- **Frustration/Anger** - a person with a visual impairment may become frustrated or angry during an activity or task. Give them feedback about their activities. They cannot see what is available to them, or how they are doing. Take time to explain what is happening.



Suggestions for Improving Areas for Visually Impaired Individuals

- **Bedroom Area:** Place a bright or contrasting colored object near the edge of dressers or night stand to assist the individual in becoming more aware of the furniture edges and avoid bumping into them.
- **Dining Area:** Use dark trays or place-mats if dishes are light colored and vice versa, and avoid patterned table cloths, as the clutter makes them visually confusing.
- **Bathroom:** Use a clear plastic shower curtain so more light is present in the shower surface, and use contrasting colored towels, soap dishes, etc. to enhance visibility against the sink and shower/tub area.



Improving Areas (cont.)

- **Living/Recreation Area:** Low, free-standing objects or pieces of furniture of poor contrast are potential hazards for the visually impaired individual. It is best not to change the furniture arrangements. If it becomes necessary, the visually impaired person should be warned and introduced to the new arrangement at a quiet time.
- **Hallways:** Hallways should be well lit, have non-reflective floor surfaces in contrasting colors relative to surrounding walls.
- **Steps & Stairs:** Placing contrasting, reflective strips on single steps, the beginnings of incline/decline areas, and on the first and last step of a flight of stairs provides warning of potentially dangerous drop-offs.

Summary

- You must use every activity, task, or moment to expand the individual's understanding of personal and environmental things. This will help to promote their independence and encourage them to learn and use new skills.
- This is one of the most important parts of your job – TEACHING.
- Involve all individuals in the normal routines of everyday life. Even if it's just talking to them and explaining what is going on.
- They must be given every opportunity to experience the world around them.

Summary (cont.)

- The individual cannot wait for the world to come to them. You must take the world to the individual.
- Your involvement, your words, movement, feelings, interpretation, the way you care for them – IS THEIR WORLD.
- **Help them experience the joys of life!!!!**

