

Interacting with People Who are Blind or Visually Impaired: Tips from The Seeing Eye®

There are many degrees of blindness and people who are blind are often expected to not be able to see at all. People who choose to travel with guide dogs may indeed appear to be sighted because they may either have good visual acuity in a very limited field, or they may have generally poor acuity but still retain the ability to see light, shapes, and even color. All of these individuals choose to travel with a guide dog to enhance their safety and mobility.

Conversation and Social Interaction:

It is best not to assume that all people who are blind need assistance. If someone appears to need assistance, approach, and identify yourself, then inquire if you can be of service. Grabbing a person who is blind unexpectedly is often frightening and communicating with the individual verbally is always best.

When providing directions, and to avoid providing the wrong directional commands, place yourself in the same direction as the visually impaired individual. Pointing with your finger is not helpful. Explain directions by using specific words; for example, “Continue straight down the hall in the direction you are facing and take a right at the end of the hall. When you reach the end of the carpet, you will be at the end of the hallway.”

Eye contact does not require vision. A person who is blind will likely look in the direction of your voice.

Identify yourself, be relaxed and be guided by the situation.

Feel free to use the words “look” and “see” as people who are blind use these words all the time.

Keep your voice normal at conversational tones when conversing with a visually impaired person.

Do not leave the presence of a person who is blind without informing the individual, as they might end up talking to themselves.

Petting, talking to, or making eye contact with a working guide dog is distracting to the dog and interferes with the handlers travel and their safety. Ask permission from the handler should you want to pet the dog, and respect their answer, especially if it is no.