

## Tips for Interacting Effectively with People who have a Vision Impairment

The terms "blindness" and "vision impairment" may mean either a complete or partial loss of vision. For some persons, only the edges or a part of the visual field might be obscured, or some persons might have no central vision although side or peripheral vision still exists. A person's visual acuity might also change under different light conditions.

Many people who are blind get around on their own by using a guide dog or cane. People with vision impairments might or might not use these or other mobility aids. For many jobs, even those requiring lots of reading, vision is not necessary. Accommodations such as Braille or voice-overs may enable the person to be effective in their jobs. Successful employment of people who are blind or who have vision impairments depends upon thorough job analysis, employer acceptance, and proper management support.

Consider the following suggestions when interacting with individuals who are blind or who have vision impairments:

- Offer assistance, but don't insist. If a person who is blind needs guidance through a door or to a chair, let the person take your arm and follow the motion of your body. Tell him or her where the chair is in relation to his or her body. If the person approaches steps, mention how many and the direction.
- Speak directly to the individual who is blind or who has a vision impairment, using a normal tone of voice.
- Introduce other people in the room or have them introduce themselves. This will assist the individual with orientation to the room and its occupants.
- Never touch or distract a service guide dog without first asking the owner for permission. Service animals are not pets and generally should not be disturbed while in a working mode.
- When giving directions, do not use references the person who is blind cannot see. For example, "over there" is not a good way of describing a location. When using directional words, use them with the orientation of the person who is blind or who has vision impairment. For example "to your right"
- Tell the individual when someone is leaving the room.
- When guiding a person into a new or strange surrounding, describe special features or decorations.
- Be prepared to read aloud information that is written, or ask the person if he or she could use the services of a trained reader.
- When interviewing or meeting with people with vision impairments, ask whether they would prefer a well-lit area. Avoid sharp contrasts of light and dark areas.
- Identify yourself and others who may be with you when meeting someone with a visual impairment.