

Serving the Needs of Individuals with Visual Impairments in Healthcare Settings: Guidelines for Ancillary & Support Staff

Introduction

- Terms associated with individuals with visual impairments include, but are not limited to: blind, low vision, legally blind, and deafblind.
 - Vision is a continuum from total blindness to those who have significant usable vision.
 - An individual's usable vision can fluctuate throughout the day.
 - Ask the individual how they would like to be identified, for example, as blind or visually impaired.

Tools and Challenges

- Tools an individual may use to access print include: braille, a magnifier, a monocular, text to speech software, and screen enlargement software.
- To move through the environment, an individual might use a white cane, a guide dog, or a human guide.
- Individuals with visual impairments may have difficulty with navigation. They may not: see signs, see where you are pointing, and/or be able to read a map visually.
- Challenges with accessing information may include: not seeing a name printed on a badge or uniform, completing or accessing paperwork, or hearing information accurately (especially if the individual is deafblind).



Dos and Don'ts That Show Respect

- **DO NOT** grab or push the individual.
- **DO NOT** talk to others who are with the individual, **DO** talk to them directly.
- **DO** identify yourself with your name and title, even if you have met before.
- **DO** ask if the individual needs assistance, **DO NOT** assume.
- **DO** use words like “look” and “see.”
- **DO** ask the individual if they need a human guide. If they say they do, allow them to hold your arm above the elbow. Walk a half step in front of the individual.
- **DO** be yourself!



Strategies

- Explain what you are going to do before you do it. For example, let the individual know before you touch them, when you are moving something, or when you leave the room.
- Ask the individual what information is helpful. Some people like to be provided an overview of what will occur, others prefer step-by-step information, and others may have enough vision to see what you are doing and prefer not to be provided verbal detail.
- Offer to provide an orientation to the area. Point out important items such as chairs or doorways. Be specific, avoiding phrases such as “over there” or relying on visual gestures when giving directions.
- Offer to model an activity for the individual so they can see how you are doing it. For example, if they need to position their body in a certain way to move from the bed to the walker, offer to show them how you do this. Describe what you are doing as you model the steps.
- If the individual has low vision, ask what combination of colors is easiest for them to see or where they would like materials positioned to maximize lighting and contrast.
- Ask the individual if they would like to walk with you using human guide.
 - Allow the individual to take your arm above the elbow.
 - Walk a half a step in front of the individual so they can feel the movement of your body and anticipate what will occur next.
 - Offer to describe information such as approaching a staircase or a door.