

## Sensitivity to Vision Loss: How to Best Assist a Person Who Has Vision Impairment

### Please Do...

1. Introduce or identify yourself and be sure to use the person's name so he/she knows you are speaking to him/her.
2. When others enter or leave the room, tell the person so he knows who is in or out of the room.
3. Inform the person about what is going on in the room or nearby surroundings so the person may be better able to make sense of the nearby sounds.
4. Use a normal tone of voice and speak directly to the person.
5. Continue to use such words as "see" and "look". There is no need to substitute the words "hear" or "listen". For example, it is appropriate to say, "watch television", not "listen to television".

### Please Don't...

It's not courteous to ask a person with vision impairment to guess your name or assume he recognizes your voice.

There is no need to speak any louder than usual.

There is no need to modify your speech or word choice except when giving directions.

## Sensitivity to Vision Loss (continued)

### **Please Do...**

### **Please Don't...**

#### **When Walking**

6. Encourage the individual to hold onto your arm, above your elbow.

Don't push or pull a person by the arm or hand.

7. When walking away from a person, even for a few seconds, leave them in contact with something stable such as a wall, chair or table.

Don't leave a person with a vision impairment standing in free space. People can feel disoriented and uncomfortable left in open space.

8. Explain environmental sounds and changes in walking surface so that the person will not be surprised or startled.

9. Pause before going up or down stairs or a curb.

#### **When Pushing Someone in a Wheelchair**

10. Talk to the person. Inform them of any upcoming changes in terrain or direction, explain the source of any loud or unexpected noises, and comment on ordinary environmental sounds.

Don't begin to push the chair without informing the person that they are about to move.

#### **When Assisting Someone to Sit**

11. Approach the chair/sofa directly from the front. Assist the person to locate the back of the chair and the seat. Inform them if the chair has arms. If balance is a concern, provide assistance as needed to turn and safely sit.

Don't guide the person to a chair that rocks or moves without letting them know what movement will occur when seated.

## Sensitivity to Vision Loss (continued)

### Please Do...

### Please Don't...

#### When Serving or Dining

12. Maintain consistency in where the person sits when eating.

13. Maintain consistency when setting the table so commonly used items are in the same location.

14. Provide adapted utensils, high-sided plates or bowls, dycem mats, etc. as appropriate to maximize independence.

15. Use color contrast between the color of the food and plate and color of the plate and table. This helps the dining experience to be more "seeable" for those with low vision.

16. Tell the person what is being served and its location on the plate: "the chicken is directly in front of you, the potatoes are to the left and the carrots are on the right. Or use "clock face" to describe: "the chicken is at 6 o'clock and the carrots are at 3".

17. Inform the person of the other items on the table such as butter, water, salt, bread basket, etc.

18. When at a restaurant, ask if the person would like the menu to be read aloud. Ask for a Braille menu if appropriate.

Don't assume the person can't feed themselves or cut their own food.

Don't assume the person can identify the food and drink from the aroma.

## Sensitivity to Vision Loss (continued)

### Please Do....

#### When Giving Directions

19. Use clear words and phrases that the person will understand. For a person with functional vision, use visual landmarks: "Turn left at the blue mailbox." Use auditory cues as needed: Tap the handrail as you say, "the handrail is on your left."

#### When Working

20. Tell the individual if things are moved.

21. Give instructions as clearly as possible. Use phrases, item names and concepts that the person understands.

22. Adapt activities and work materials and workspace as needed. Control glare and use task lighting, contrast, jigs, textures, sound sources, etc.

#### General Safety Considerations

23. Furniture should be kept in the same place. If it is moved, inform and/or reorient the person to the room.

24. Doors should be open all the way or closed all the way.

### Please Don't ...

Don't give vague directions such as "it over there".

Don't point or gesture without giving clear verbal directions.

Don't move or remove anything from the person's workspace without telling them what is being moved and where it will be put.

Be careful not to confuse the person with left/right directions. Remember if you are facing the person, your left is their right.

Moving furniture can be disorienting and a real safety hazard.

## Sensitivity to Vision Loss (continued)

### Please Do...

### Please Don't...

#### General Safety Considerations (continued)

25. Consider locking or alarming doors that lead to descending stairs.

Never leave doors to descending stairs open.

26. Keep hallways and common areas free of clutter, especially in frequently traveled areas.

27. Secure scatter rugs to the floor so they do not slide or turn up at the corners. Replace worn and frayed carpets.

Fringe on rugs is a tripping hazard.

28. Use matte finish paints and polishes.

Avoid floor cleaners that add shine or gloss or make the surface slippery.

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#### **See also MCB/DDS Partnership handouts:**

- Task Organization
- Common Signs of Vision Loss
- Human Guide
- Creating a Saft Environment

**For additional resources and links, please visit:**  
[focusonvisionandvisionloss.org](http://focusonvisionandvisionloss.org)