



# Communicating Comfortably with Blind or Visually Impaired Persons

While many people who are blind or visually impaired have some vision, you shouldn't assume they can make out where you are and what you're doing when you are in the same room. Here are some helpful guidelines that can make communications between you more comfortable:

## ■ Greet the person by name.

As soon as a person who is blind or visually impaired enters a room, be sure to greet the person by name. This alerts the person to your presence, avoids startling them, and eliminates uncomfortable silences.



## ■ Speak directly.

Speak directly to the person who is blind or visually impaired, not through an intermediary.



## ■ Speak distinctly.

Use a natural conversational tone and speed. Unless the person is hard of hearing, you do not need to raise your voice.



## ■ Use "people first" language.

No one wants to be labeled by how they are different. It's kinder, and more accurate, to say "a person who is blind" rather than "a blind person." We are all people first.



## ■ Be an active listener.

Give the person opportunities to talk. Respond with questions and comments to keep the conversation going. A person who is blind or visually impaired can't necessarily see the look of interest on your face, so give verbal cues to let him or her know that you are actively listening.



## ■ Indicate the end of a conversation

Indicate the end of a conversation with a person who is totally blind or severely visually impaired to avoid the embarrassment of leaving the person speaking when no one is actually there.



## ■ Relax

Don't be embarrassed if you use common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about this?" that seems to relate to a person who is blind. Just as a person who uses a wheelchair still goes for a walk, a person who is blind will still be pleased — or not — to see you. In other words, people who are blind use the same expressions as those who are sighted.



## ■ People who are blind treat their guide dogs and white canes as extensions of their bodies.

Never distract guide dogs from their job or touch, move or grab a cane without the owner's permission.

Access laws in the United States and Canada, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, permit people who are blind to be accompanied by their guide dogs everywhere the general public is allowed: stores, restaurants, office buildings, taxis, buses and all areas of public accommodation. A guide dog is trained to stand, sit or lie quietly in public places when not leading.



## ■ If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted.

Then listen or ask for instructions. Many people who are blind will accept help; however, make sure they are aware that you are going to help them and offer your arm.

When you are approaching steps, say "we are at a step or steps" and say if the steps are going up or down. If there is a hand rail ask the person if he/she would like to use the rail. If he/she says yes put his/her hand on the rail.

When showing a person to a chair, offer to put his/her hand on the back of the chair.

