



## **WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

### **A guide for sighted people who don't know what to do**

#### **when they meet someone with impaired vision**

About 9.0 million people in the United States live with impaired vision. About 80 percent see shadows, have only tunnel vision, or can read very large print. Impaired vision does not limit most people's activities; it changes how they perform them. A co-worker may use adaptive computer equipment. A parent reads with a magnifying glass. Your child's classmate may use a white cane to travel independently.

Persons who are legally blind carry a white cane with or without a red tip. The Ohio White Cane Law states that drivers must yield the right-of-way to a person carrying a white cane, regardless of the traffic signal or where the crosswalk is.

About 10 percent of the visually impaired population chooses to use a trained dog guide. You recognize this working animal by the harness he wears, with a rigid handle. Not all are German Shepherds. Labradors and Golden Retrievers are also popular dog guides.

Dog guide users also have the right-of-way, just as cane users do, and the dogs legally may go anywhere, including restaurants and hospitals. Please resist the temptation to talk to or pet a dog guide. It must not be distracted while it is working.

Individuals who have some vision may choose to wear dark glasses, because bright lights may cause discomfort, or painful glare. Not everyone who is blind or visually impaired wears them.

If you realize the person waiting to cross the street with you is visually impaired, don't panic. Ask "Would you like some assistance?" They may say "No, thank you." Don't persist.

If they say "Yes," let them advise you how they want to be assisted.

In this document, we provide basic tips if you do offer assistance and the answer is “Yes.”

Sighted guide is the easiest way to lead a person, especially in a crowded or confusing area. Allow the individual to grasp your arm above the elbow. As you walk, keep your arm relaxed at your side. He or she will be about a half-step behind, and can sense as you change directions. Announce as you approach doorways, stairs or other changes in the environment.

Always go first, rather than push or pull the person with vision impairment. To get through a narrow passage, drop your arm slightly behind you, as you explain the change. He or she will move behind so the two of you may pass single file.

Identify yourself. It’s no fun to guess who you’re speaking to, and it can sometimes be embarrassing. In a group, it is especially important to use the individual’s name so he or she knows when being spoken to. Let the person know when you leave the room, so he or she does not end up talking to themselves, thinking you’re still there.

If you must leave someone, guide them to a chair if you can. Put their hand on the back of the chair and he or she will sit. Guiding them near a corner or wall will suffice if no chair is available. Describe what you are doing, and don’t leave the person standing amid open space.

Speak directly to the individual, not companions. You need not raise your voice – vision loss does not necessarily affect hearing.

Don’t be uncomfortable using words like “look” or “see.” With audio description, many persons who are visually impaired “watch” television and enjoy movies. However, don’t use vague expressions like “over there” and hand signals.

In many restaurants, Braille or large print menus are available. If not, offer to read the menu aloud. When the food arrives, use the face of a clock to describe its position on the plate. No one likes to hunt to find the entree’.

In retail stores, the individual may ask for information regarding color or style of the item being purchased. Your customer may use Braille-marked or large print checks or other adaptive aids to pay for the purchase. When making change, discreetly identify the denomination of the bill you are handing back.

The State of Ohio issues a legal identification card for those who do not drive. You must accept it as a valid form of identification, just as you would the driver’s license.

If you have a visitor with vision impairment, don’t leave doors or cabinets ajar. Loose cords and items on the floor can cause accidents, too. Ask before you turn up the lights because too much light may be uncomfortable. In fact, some people can see better on overcast days. If visiting, don’t move furnishings without telling your host.

Don’t shy away from friendly conversation. You may want to ask “But how do you cross country ski?” While we all have days where we may not want to talk about ourselves, taking interest in another person is nothing to be uncomfortable about.

Don't be afraid to ask how to be most effective when assisting a person with vision impairment. Using the guidelines outlined in this document, you should feel more at ease.

The American Council of the Blind of Ohio is a non-profit organization committed to improving the quality and equality of life for all persons who are blind or visually impaired. Our members include persons who are blind, losing vision, or are parents of a child who is blind or visually impaired. We welcome anyone who wishes to work toward equal rights and full participation in society for everyone with a disability.

Please remember ACB-Ohio when you prioritize your charity giving. Your gift will allow us to better serve Ohio's visually impaired citizens.

If you would like to remember ACB-Ohio in your will or make a gift in honor, or memory of a friend or family member, please contact Marc Guthrie, ACB-Ohio's Director of Development and Advocacy at (740) 344-6222.

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Thank you for caring about Ohio's visually impaired citizens! If you have questions regarding ACB-Ohio's programs or mission, contact:

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