

## How to Interact Appropriately with a Blind or Visually Impaired Person

### Basic Principles:

- Don't assume what a blind person needs or can do. The only assumption you should have is that they are competent to take care of themselves. Most of the time, blind people do not need help.
- If it does appear that a blind person needs help, observe them and the situation before approaching to offer assistance. Many times, it will turn out that the person does not need what you initially think they need.
- If a blind person does need help, approach them and ask in a normal tone of voice if they need assistance. Allow the person to tell you what they need.

### Practical Advice:

- Never ask personal questions about a person's blindness such as how they lost their vision, how they cope with being blind, if they dream, if they've tried a particular remedy, etc.
- Do not tell a blind person they are brave or inspirational.
- Unless a blind person is in imminent danger, never shout at them from a distance. Move closer to speak in a normal voice.
- Never grab a blind person's body, accessories, cane, or dog when trying to stop or guide them.
- When giving verbal directions, do so from the blind person's perspective (e.g. your right might be their left).
- Keep verbal directions simple and do not repeat directions unnecessarily. Too much verbal feedback makes navigating more difficult.
- Always speak directly to a blind person, not their companion.
- Service dogs are always working, so do not pet or interact with them.
- If a blind person is contentedly standing or sitting still, do not ask if they need help.
- Don't hold open a door for a blind person simply because they are blind. It's usually easier for a blind person to navigate the environment, such as going through a door, without human interference.

- If you do choose to hold open a door for the sake of being polite, verbally indicate that the door is open.
- Make sure the door is open all the way. Don't hold a door halfway open from the inside. A closed door is better than a halfway opened door.

#### Physical Guidance:

- When physically guiding a blind person, do not grab their arm or any other body part. Instead, allow them to take hold of you.
- Blind people are not all the same. Some will hold on to your upper arm while others will place their hand on your shoulder or upper back.
- Do not stick out your arm or contort your body to make it easier for them to take hold of you. It's best to simply stand normally and turn yourself so that your side is available.
- Walk at your normal pace. You don't need to walk slowly unless you are told to do so. Walking slowly can be more difficult for a blind person.
- Most blind people can walk up and down stairs with you. Simply indicate that you are approaching stairs, and the blind person will let you know if they prefer a different path.
- If the person you are guiding is using their cane, you don't need to point out curbs, elevation changes, or bumps in the path.