

# MEETING A PERSON WITH VISION LOSS/BLINDNESS (One Credit Hour)

## INTRODUCTION

Friends, family, care providers and others are often uncomfortable when encountering people with vision loss/blindness. That is simply because they are unsure of what to do. Most of the following tips are suggestions from people with blindness. These tips are intended to put you more at ease when approaching and/or spending time with people with blindness.

## TIPS

When approaching or meeting a person with blindness, identify yourself verbally. If necessary, lightly touch his/her arm or hand to let him/her know that you are talking to him/her. Don't walk away without saying so.

If possible, speak to the person and not through someone else.

Speak naturally. Unless the person has hearing loss, there is no need to raise your voice.

If asked for directions or help locating something, use words to describe where things are in relation to where the person is and how he/she is oriented. Use clear adjectives and directional phrases. For example:

### DO SAY

*The bench is to your immediate right.*

*The table is behind you and to your right.*

*The store entrance is about ten feet to your left.*

### DON'T SAY

*The bench is over there.*

*The table is back there.*

*The store entrance is near.*

Ask permission before helping. If you think the person needs help, simply ask, "Can I help you?" Never grab at them or items in their possession without asking first. If your offer for help is declined, accept their answer and don't keep pushing your help. The person knows their own capabilities and limitations.

Remember that blindness is not a personality trait. It is important to remember that blindness is a physical attribute, not a personality trait. Blindness does not define who someone is, what their personality is like, or what they're capable of. In other words:

*Know me for my abilities, not my disability.* Robert M. Hensel

Be considerate and respectful but don't feel like you need to walk on eggshells regarding visual language. You don't need to get flustered or apologize for inadvertently referring to sign in normal, everyday context. (ie. "did you see my email?"). Francesa Marinaro says, "The implication that blind people don't, or that they shouldn't, use visual language is problematic because it implies that we haven't accepted our blindness to the point that we can't acknowledge that we live in a visual world."

When visiting someone with blindness, don't move things without asking. Put things back where you found them.

Be mindful of guide dog etiquette. Approaching and/or petting an on-duty guide dog can distract the dog from the job of keeping their owner safe.

Do not tamper with the aids of a person with blindness. Do not relocate or 'play' with their assistive technology devices. Never move someone's cane.



Adapted from the following resources: [themighty.com](http://themighty.com); [www.ibmilw.com](http://www.ibmilw.com); [visionaware.org](http://visionaware.org) and [www.arkansaschoolfortheblind.org](http://www.arkansaschoolfortheblind.org)

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