

What To Do When You Meet a Person Who Is Blind or Visually Impaired

Meeting someone who is blind or visually impaired may feel unfamiliar at first, but it does not need to be complicated. A few simple courtesies can help make interactions comfortable and respectful for everyone.

1. Say Hello and Introduce Yourself

For example: *"Hi, it's Sarah."* This lets the person know who is speaking and that you are there.

2. Speak Directly

Speak directly to the person who is blind or visually impaired, not to the person beside them. If you know the person's name, use it in conversation so they know you are speaking to them. If you would like to shake hands, simply let them know. For example: *"Hi, I'm John. May I shake your hand?"*

3. Ask Before Helping

If you think someone may need assistance, ask first. For example: *"Would you like some help?"* If help is accepted, ask how you can assist.

4. Offering Your Arm

If guiding is requested, allow the person to hold your arm just above the elbow and walk at a comfortable pace. As you walk, briefly mention important information such as curbs, stairs (up or down), doorways, or changes in surface or direction. Simple cues like *"curb coming up"* or *"stairs going down"* are helpful.

5. Give Clear Directions

Be specific and descriptive. For example: *"There's an empty seat on your left."*, *"The door is directly in front of you."*, or *"The counter is just ahead."*

6. Describe the Environment When Helpful

A brief description can help someone orient themselves, such as noting stairs or a curb, or indicating where a chair or counter is located.

7. Let the Person Know When You Are Leaving

If you are finishing a conversation, let the person know you are leaving so they are not left speaking to an empty space.

8. Do Not Grab the Person or Their Cane

Avoid grabbing, pushing, or pulling a person who is blind or visually impaired, and do not move their cane. If assistance is needed, offer your arm and allow the person to choose how they would like to receive help.

9. Relax and Be Yourself

People who are blind or visually impaired do everyday things just like everyone else. A friendly attitude and clear communication go a long way.

Remember: Respect, clear communication, and asking before assisting are the most helpful things you can do.