

Seeing Beyond Blindness

Building comfort and
confidence when interacting
with individuals who are
blind or visually impaired



**MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION
FOR THE BLIND**

Learning Objectives

After completing this training, you will be able to:

1. Explain 2 benefits of employing individuals who are blind or visually impaired
2. Describe basic norms for interacting with individuals who are blind or visually impaired
3. Articulate language and behavior do's and don'ts
4. Demonstrate inclusive strategies and techniques when being a sighted guide

Understanding and Gaining Comfort

I wear
glasses.
Am I
“visually
impaired”?

Low Vision

Persons with a best-corrected visual acuity of 20/40 to 20/160 are considered to have low vision.

Legally Blind* (1/10th of normal vision)

Persons with a best-corrected visual acuity of 20/200 or worse, or a visual field of 20 degrees or less, are considered legally blind.

Blind*

Persons who have no light perception are considered totally blind.

***Eligible for MCB services**

Seeing the value ...



Strong problem-solving skills, with a focus on troubleshooting daily product or environmental challenges



Above average employee loyalty, productivity and efficiency rates



Lived experiences provide valuable user insights for industrial design and development teams



Highly tech savvy due to necessary use of Assistive Technology



Potential career paths can include ... ANYTHING!



Contribute to culture of inclusion and help support organizational Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging initiatives

Where do I start?

1. **Introduce** yourself, “Hi, I’m
2. **Ask** rather than assume that help is needed
3. **Offer** assistance such as human guiding or voice cues
4. **Common-sense**
The Golden Rule applies: treat individual with respect and dignity

Interaction Dos and Don'ts

DO

- Identify yourself when entering or exiting a room
- Speak directly to the individual
- Use regular speaking volume
- Establish a point of contact when leaving an individual alone
- When in doubt, **ask** if assistance is needed. If “yes”, **ask** if they would like to take your arm or prefer only voice cues.
- Be specific with directions by using “left”, “right” or clock orientation directions
- Keep doors & cabinets completely closed

DON'T

- Assume the individual will recognize your voice or hear you entering/exiting
- Speak to everyone BUT the individual
- Yell or exaggerate your speech
- Leave an individual standing in “free space”
- Assume help is needed, grab the individual's arm or cane or touch the guide dog
- Jaywalk or cross the street in an unsafe manner when guiding
- Point or use expressions such as, “It's over there”
- Leave doors ajar or move items or furniture around

Human Guide Techniques



OFFERING ASSISTANCE



- ② Touch the visually impaired person's arm with your elbow on the side he/she prefers to use.



Guiding Technique/Sighted Guide

- ① Position yourself slightly in front of the person you are guiding.

- ③ He or she can then take your arm above the elbow

Guiding Technique Best Practices

Approach

Handgrip

Stance

Pace

Stairs

Seating

Entering/Exiting a Vehicle

Doorways

Narrow Passageways

Guide Dogs

Guide Dog Etiquette

DO

- Speak to the handler rather than the dog
- Respect that the dog is focused and working
- Keep your own dog a distance away from a working dog
- Treat the handler with sensitivity and respect
- Inform the handler if a service dog approaches you
- If being a human guide, ask if the individual prefers to be guided by your arm or prefers to follow you independently - as guide dogs are taught to “follow”

DON'T

- Touch the dog without asking permission first (ideally, don't even ask!)
- Whistle or make sounds to distract the dog
- Offer a service dog food
- Assume a napping service dog is off duty
- Assume service dogs never get to ‘just be dogs’
- Correct the dog. It is the responsibility of the handler. If there's an issue that needs to be addressed about a dog's behavior, discuss it with the handler; she or he is the best person to resolve the issue.

Poll #1

You notice someone using a white cane, standing independently on the curb at a busy intersection. What should you do?

- A. Say, “Hi, my name is _____. Let me take your arm and I’ll help you across the intersection.”
- B. Take the individual’s arm and guide them across the intersection.
- C. Say, “Hi, my name is _____. Would you like any help crossing the intersection?”
- D. Nothing. People with visual impairments are fully capable. They will ask if they need help.

Poll #2

You are a dog lover. You see a guide dog sitting quietly next to its owner's side. What should you do?

- A. Approach the dog, offer it a treat and give it a scratch on the head for being such a good dog.
- B. Say, "Hi, my name is _____. May I please pet your dog?"
- C. Quietly wave, smile and make affectionate noises toward the dog to demonstrate your fondness.
- D. Nothing. You should never engage with a guide dog.

Poll #3

Jen, your new teammate, is blind. You are unsure of how she can perform tasks and complete projects with the same level of skill and productivity as the rest of the team. What do you do?

- A. Ask my manager how Jen is able to get her job done and if there are tasks we should avoid giving her.
- B. Say, "Hi, Jen. My name is _____. I'm looking forward to working with and getting to know you."
- C. Discuss my concerns with my teammates to see what they know.
- D. Nothing. Wait and see.

Workplace Accommodations

MCB Employment Services

- All MCB Employment Services are FREE and highlighted by high touch, personalized ongoing support, consultation, and communication with both the individual and key business stakeholders throughout the pre and post-employment process.
- MCB prides itself on providing customized consultation and assessment to meet employee and employer needs. Services are tailored to each individual and work environment and are provided in collaboration with organizational supervisors, IT departments, and other relevant key stakeholders.
- Access [MCB Employment Services](#) for a comprehensive overview.

Most Common Types of MCB Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services

Orientation and Mobility (O&M)

- Canes

- Guide Dogs

- Travel Training

Rehabilitation Teaching (RT)

- Labeling items

- Instruction of work tasks non-visually

Assistive Technology (AT)

- Screen Reading Software: JAWS

- Magnification Software: Zoomtext

- Closed Captioned TV (CCTV)

- Braille and non-braille Note takers

- I-Phone

Questions?



Connect with our
Employment
Services Department
with questions and
to learn more about
opportunities for
collaboration!



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Sources

- [Massachusetts Commission For The Blind](#)
- [Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals](#)
- [Adaptive Guiding Techniques](#)
- [Assoc for the Education and Rehabilitation \(AER\) of the Blind and Visually Impaired](#)
- [Canine Companions for Independence](#)
- [CNIB Foundation](#)
- [Disabilty:IN](#)
- [Focus on Vision and Vision Loss Website](#)
- [Hadley School for the Blind](#)
- [National Eye Institute](#)
- [Northeast Regional Center for Vision Education](#)
- [Northeast AER \(NEAER\) Chapter Website](#)
- [Step-by-Step: The Sighted Guide Technique](#)