

Sighted Guide Techniques



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Sighted Guide Techniques Offer Simple Help

There are a variety of techniques that are easy to learn and an efficient way to provide a person who is legally blind with meaningful assistance. Braille Institute has given expert instruction to thousands of blind people for several decades, enabling them to develop the skills they need for effective orientation – the ability to identify their surroundings – and mobility – the ability to travel safely from one location to another. A significant percentage of people who are blind are adept at traveling, either alone, using a white cane, or with a guide dog, yet many appreciate assistance in an unfamiliar environment.

Even the most proficient travelers utilize sighted guides on occasion to become better acquainted with new areas, to cross unfamiliar streets or to maneuver around obstacles.

The sighted guide techniques outlined here will help make assisting a blind person easier, but they will not make you proficient. Actual sighted guide training is recommended and is available through the nearest Braille Institute center.

Making Contact

When approaching a person who is blind, introduce yourself and ask whether they would like your help. Do not grab or pull at them. If they indicate they would like assistance, verbally offer your arm and brush it against theirs.



Grasp

The blind person should grasp your arm just above the elbow with their fingers on the inside near your waist and their thumb on the outside. The grasp must be firm to be maintained while walking, yet not so tight as to cause discomfort. If the grip is too tight, say so.

This technique allows you flexibility and freedom of motion with both of your hands, and gives the blind person a sense of your body motion.

Children's Grasp

The standard grasp often is too high for children, so it may be best to have them grasp your wrist or hold your hand. This gives you and the child greater comfort and sense of control.

Support Grasp

Some blind people are frail. Others have balance problems that make use of the standard grasp inadequate.

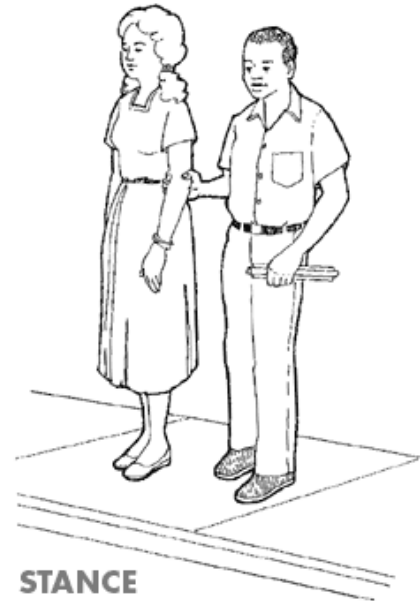
Rather than holding your arm above the elbow, a blind person may prefer to link their arm with yours. This will decrease the space between the two of you and provide added support.

To accommodate a blind person's unsteadiness you likely will need to slow your walking pace.

Stance

Hold your arm relaxed and steady at your side. The blind person's arm is at a 90-degree angle and held close to their side. They should proceed by being one half-step behind you. The blind person will follow your movements. Do not steer them.

If you meet a blind person who seems to be "off course" while crossing a street, perhaps out of the crosswalk, remember that most have been taught to respond to verbal instructions such as "go left" or "go right," but use *their* left or right, not yours if you are facing them!



Taking a Seat

When possible approach a chair from the front or side. Tell the blind person they're at the front or side and slowly bring them up to it until their knees or shins touch the seat. Say whether the chair has arms.

Place your hand on the chair back and let them follow your arm down to locate it with the hand they have been grasping your arm with.

Allow blind people to seat themselves. Do not help them physically or move the chair or other furniture unless asked to. Say if there is a table.

Unless frail or otherwise disabled, blind people are capable of getting up from a chair without help. Once they are standing, the correct stance and grasp techniques can be used.



Narrow-Area Stance

When you are approaching areas that are crowded or narrow, such as a doorway, move your forearm and hand so that they rest against the lower portion of your back, with your elbow at a 90-degree angle and your palm facing outward.

The blind person will take this cue, slide their hand down to your wrist and move directly behind you at an arm's length, while still maintaining a firm grip. Take smaller steps and walk slower as you move through the narrow area.

For comfort have the blind person move their grasp from above your elbow to your wrist.

After walking through the narrow area, return your arm to the guide position and walk normally.

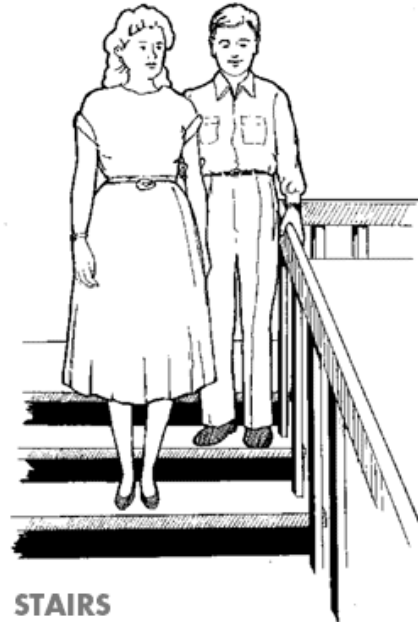
Doors

When approaching a door, assume the narrow-area stance and tell the blind person in which direction the door opens. This allows them to help you by holding the door with their free hand while passing through it.

Do not try to turn around to hold the door open. This is awkward and diverts your attention.

Stairs

Six feet before reaching the first step, tell the blind person you are guiding that you are approaching stairs. Approach them directly and in such a way that the blind person's free hand is closest to the rail. Mention whether the stairs go up or down and how many there are. Pause to allow them to locate the first step and the railing. Always remain a step ahead and proceed as you normally would. Remain to the right-hand side of stairs to avoid a collision with others.



Pause at each landing to allow the blind person to stand beside you and to cue them that there are no more steps until you begin to move again. Tell the blind person when you have reached the top or bottom of the stairs.

What Next?

These techniques are useful in numerous circumstances. Family and friends often use them in daily situations such as shopping, dining out or other community activities.

Co-workers find these techniques helpful when one of their peers is legally blind.

Healthcare professionals and other caregivers also benefit from knowing these techniques.

Many people receive this informational publication during a seminar, speaking engagement or specialized in-service training session provided by Braille Institute. These and a vast array of other presentations are provided free of charge to individuals or groups. Formal sighted guide training is available by contacting one of our regional centers during business hours, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.