



Effective Communications in Hospitals

Promoting Meaningful Communications in Health Care

SENSITIVITY TO BLINDNESS OR VISUAL IMPAIRMENT (Adapted from a publication of the American Foundation for the Blind)

1. Introduce yourself to persons who are blind or visually-impaired using your name and/or position, especially if you are wearing a name badge containing this information.
2. Speak directly to persons who are blind or visually-impaired using a natural conversational tone and speed. Do not speak loudly and slowly unless the person also has a hearing impairment.
3. Address persons who are totally blind or severely visually-impaired by name when possible. This is especially important in crowded areas where persons cannot distinguish whether you are looking toward them by hearing the direction from which your voice is coming.
4. Speak directly to persons who are blind or visually-impaired, not through a companion, guide, or other individual.
5. Immediately greet persons who are blind or visually-impaired when they enter a room or a service area. This allows you to let them know you are present and ready to assist. And, it eliminates uncomfortable silences.
6. When you greet a visually impaired person whom you have previously met, identify yourself by name. Even though the person remembers you, he/she may not connect your name and voice in the moment.
7. Indicate the end of a conversation with a person who is totally blind or severely visually impaired to avoid the embarrassment of leaving a person speaking when no one is actually there.
8. Feel free to use words that refer to vision during the course of conversations with persons who are blind or visually-impaired. Vision-oriented words such as “look”, “see”, and “watching TV” are a part of everyday verbal communication. The words “blind” and “visually impaired” are acceptable in conversation.
9. Be precise and thorough when you describe people, places, or things to persons who are totally blind. Don’t leave things out or change a description because you think it is unimportant or unpleasant.
10. Feel free to use visually descriptive language. Making reference to colors, patterns, designs, and shapes is perfectly acceptable.
11. Speak about a person with a disability by first referring to the person and then the disability. You should, therefore, refer to persons who are blind rather than to blind persons.
12. Offer to guide persons who are blind or visually impaired by asking if they would like assistance. Offer them your arm. It is not always necessary to provide guided assistance; in some instances, it can be disorienting and disruptive. Respect the desires of the person you are with.

13. Guide persons who request assistance by allowing them to take your arm just above the elbow when the arm is bent. Walk ahead of the persons you are guiding. Never grab a person who is blind or visually impaired by the arm and push him/her forward.
14. Dog guides are working mobility tools. Do not pet them, feed them, or distract them while they are working.
15. Do not leave a person who is blind or visually impaired standing alone in "free space" when you serve as a guide. Mention environmental features such as chairs, walls, or counters and ask the person that you are guiding where he/she would like to wait for you if you have to be separated momentarily.
16. Be calm and clear about what to do if you see a person who is blind or visually impaired about to encounter a dangerous situation. Distinguish degree of danger clearly in your communications. For example, if a person who is blind is walking toward an open construction site, call out to the person to stop because open construction is ahead. Then approach the person, briefly describe the situation, and offer assistance. If a person who is blind is approaching a less dangerous obstacle such as a stanchion in a hot lobby, call out that there is a pole in front of the person and ask if assistance is wanted