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The language used to talk about disability and impairments affects the way society views disabled people. Inappropriate language can be disempowering, humiliating and rude. However, anxieties about 'political correctness' may leave you worried about saying the wrong thing or causing offence. The terminology adopted by disabled people has changed over the years, making it difficult to know which terms are acceptable.

As a general rule of thumb you should

- behave naturally and respectfully, as you would to any other person
- talk to the disabled person, not their assistant
- avoid making assumptions about a person's impairment or their needs
- take care not to make intrusive or inappropriate personal remarks.

Some older terminology is sometimes still heard (as abuse), but it is offensive and should never be used. This includes terms such as spastic, dumb, cripple, mad and mongol.

Although there is not universal agreement on acceptable and appropriate language, the following 'dos' and 'don't's' should be helpful.

## Suggested terminology when referring to disability

Use	Instead of
Disabled people or disabled students	The disabled In the UK there is a move away from using 'people with disabilities' or 'students with disabilities'
Has epilepsy, is visually impaired, is deaf, etc.	Handicapped, suffering from ....., afflicted by ....., a victim of ..... Avoid negative or overly emotional language
Person or student with epilepsy, dyslexia or schizophrenia	Epileptic, dyslexic, schizophrenic
'John has a mobility impairment'	'John is mobility impaired'
Deaf people or deaf students  'hard of hearing' refers to people with mild to moderate hearing loss	The deaf, deaf and dumb The deaf community tends not to use the term 'deaf and hard of hearing'
Wheelchair user	Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair
Disabled person, person with a mobility impairment	Crippled, spastic
Disabled person, person with Down's syndrome	Mongol
Blind person, partially sighted	The blind
Non-disabled person	Able bodied
Person with dyslexia, person with specific learning difficulties	Word blind

## **Experience of disability**

A persons' experience of disability is derived from their life experience and may include:

- upbringing
- cultural, social and religious background
- previous experiences of travelling
- previous life experiences
- personality
- experience of discrimination
- the onset of the impairment
- whether or not the impairment is progressive.

So even though two people may have a similar type and level of impairment it is most unlikely that they will have the same experience of disability.

It is extremely difficult to gain even a general awareness of what it's like to live with a disability. Putting on simulation glasses or a hearing aid helps in developing an understanding of some of the issues it does not simulate being deaf or blind.

# Sighted Guide

- Q.** Why teach sighted guide?
- A.** To allow a client to:-
- travel efficiently when using someone as a guide
  - feel confident in being guided
  - give assistance to others

## THE BASIC TECHNIQUE

It is important to remember that this is a recommended technique but that if someone already uses a technique which they are comfortable with, is safe and they are confident using it, then they do not have to adopt this technique. There may also be social, cultural or physical reasons why someone prefers to use an alternative technique.

### 1. MAKING CONTACT

a. As a guide position yourself beside the client and facing in the same direction. Offer verbal assistance and check whether they prefer to take your left or right arm. It can be helpful to gently touch the client's arm with your elbow. Once contact is made ask the client to move their hand up to the area just above your elbow.

OR ALTERNATIVELY

b. Ask the client if you may take hold of their arm. Use the back of your hand to make the initial contact. After making contact slide your hand up the guide's arm to the area just above the elbow.

### 2. ESTABLISHING THE HAND GRIP AND THE ARM POSITION

Having located the area just above the elbow the client positions their fingers so that the thumb is on the outside of the guide's arm and the fingers are on the inside. This results in the client's arm being bent at an approximate 90 degree angle with the upper arm held comfortably against their side.

The guide should keep their upper arm straight and in a relaxed position. The lower arm can be bent if this is more comfortable. When the correct arm position and grip have been established the client should be at the guide's side but a half step behind.

### 3. MOVING OFF, WALKING AND SPEED CONTROL

The guide should check that the client is ready to move off or the client should indicate that they are ready to proceed. The client should be half a pace behind and the shoulders of the client's grip arm should be in line with the shoulders of the guide's gripped arm.

At all times the client should be in control and should control the walking pace by verbally indicating to the guide or by pulling or pushing on the guide's gripped arm.

## **4. NEGOTIATING NARROW SPACES**

Often as you travel through a narrow space, in the sighted guide position, there will be insufficient space for you to maintain the standard position. As a guide you should inform your client that you are approaching a narrow space and/or move your grip arm behind you towards the small of your back. The client should then, while maintaining the sighted guide grip, step directly behind the guide so that both are travelling in single file. It is important that the client also extends the grip arm so that he does not stand on his guide's heels.

On returning to an open area the guide should return the grip arm to their side and if necessary tell the client to resume normal sighted guide position.

### **5a. TURNING OUTWARD**

If there is a lot of room for making a turn then normal sighted guide position can be maintained. When making the turn it is preferable for the guide to turn around the client but if this is not possible and the guide needs to be on the inside then care should be taken to turn slowly on the spot so as not to "swing" the client around.

### **5b. TURNING INWARD**

When in a confined space it is preferable for the guide and client to turn and face each other while retaining the grip. The client should then take hold of the guide's other arm, release the original grip and continue the turn.

## **6. CHANGING SIDES**

The guide informs the client that they need to change sides which prompts the client to trail his grip hand across the guides back to locate the other arm and then resume normal sighted guide position on this side. The client should maintain contact with the guide throughout the movement.

### **7a. LOCATING AND SITTING IN A CHAIR**

The guide should approach the chair and place his hand on the back of the chair. The client can determine the direction and height of the chair by sliding their hand down the guide's arm and onto the chair. The client can then check there is nothing on the chair and sit down.

### **7b. SITTING AT A TABLE**

If the chair is located at a table then the client should identify the chair using the described method and then should identify the chair using the described method and then should locate the edge of the table with the back of the free hand. Then by keeping contact with the chair and the table the client can move to the side of the chair and pull it out. He can then seat himself and square up with the table and the guide should explain what is on the table and who else is sitting at the table.

## **7c. ROWS OF CHAIRS**

Usually the guide should lead into the row and indicate which is the vacant chair. The client can then seat themselves.

## **8. NEGOTIATING DOORS**

On approaching a door the client should always be on the hinge side so it may be necessary to change sides. The guide should inform the client that they are approaching a door and reach forward and take hold of the handle with the grip hand. The guide should start to open the door which will indicate to the client if it is a push or pull door. The client should then slide their free hand down the guide's grip arm until they locate the door handle and hold the door open while the guide passes through first and the client follows. As the client is in control of the door he can close it when his guide and he have passed through.

## **9. NEGOTIATING STAIRS**

The guide should inform the client that they are approaching the stairs and if he wishes can say whether they are up or down although this is not essential. The guide should pause before the first step and inform the client if there is a handrail. The guide should step onto the first step and pause, this movement will inform the client if they are up or down stairs and also the depth of the stairs. The guide should then proceed up or down the stairs after checking that the client is ready. On passing the last step the guide should pause briefly and the change in position of the grip arm will indicate to the client that they are on the level again. A verbal prompt could also be given.

## **Five helpful hints for guiding a blind or partially sighted person**

1. Say who you are and offer help, communicate clearly and listen to the person's request (they will confirm if they want assistance).
2. Ask where and how the person would like to be guided.
3. Allow the person to take your arm, rather than you holding theirs.
4. Say if you're approaching steps (and whether they go up or down), kerbs or hazards.
5. Say when you have finished providing assistance and are leaving the person.

### **Sighted Guiding Video on You Tube**

Learn how to be competent and confident:

[sighted guide part 1](#)

[sighted guide part 2](#)



## Communicating with a person who is visually impaired

Many people are unsure of how to communicate naturally with a blind person or how – or indeed, whether – to offer assistance. It helps if you remember the following.

- When greeting a student who is visually impaired, say who you are when you start to speak.
- To shake hands or not? Be guided by the actions of the visually impaired person because they may not be able to see your proffered hand.
- Speak naturally – do not avoid visually descriptive language or phrases such as ‘see you later’.
- Indicate that a conversation has ended or that you are leaving in order to avoid the student speaking when no-one is there.
- You may need to explain the reason for sudden loud noises or laughter.
- Guide dogs are working dogs and must not be distracted or fussed over. Unless you are involved in making an arrangement to accommodate them, they should generally be ignored; eye contact is discouraged.
- It can sometimes be helpful to give information about the physical environment.
- A blind student may or may not use a white cane or stick. ‘Symbol canes’ are usually just held, and their purpose is to advise that the person has difficulties seeing. Long canes are used to check the ground (e.g. for obstacles, steps, kerbs) for several paces ahead. A cane or stick with a red band means the person also has a hearing impairment. Do not move a blind person’s cane without their permission.
- A blind person learns the location of things, do not move them around without letting the person know.

## Communicating with a person who is hearing impaired

Many people are unsure of how to communicate naturally with a person they suspect to have or know has a hearing impairment. It helps if you remember the following.

- Establish eye contact to ensure the person who is hearing impaired knows you are communicating.
- Reduce background noise or move to a quieter area if required.
- Think about light – avoid standing with a bright light or the sun behind you.
- Consider distance
- Speak clearly, but do not shout or over-exaggerate mouth patterns
- Be prepared to re-phrase rather than repeat.
- Use natural gesture if helpful
- Avoid speaking when eating!

# Useful Information

## Useful to know .....

- Sensory Support Service  
[www.sensorysupportservice.org.uk](http://www.sensorysupportservice.org.uk)
- Helpful organisations:
  - Action on Hearing Loss  
[www.actionhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actionhearingloss.org.uk)
  - RNIB  
[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)
  - DeafPlus/VisionPlus  
[www.deafplus.org.uk](http://www.deafplus.org.uk)      [www.visionplus.org.uk](http://www.visionplus.org.uk)
- Service dogs  
[www.guidedogs.org.uk](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk)      [www.hearingdogs.org.uk](http://www.hearingdogs.org.uk)
- Access to Work  
[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
- Bus passes/rail passes
- Sign language classes – local colleges