

Guiding a person with a vision impairment



NCBI

**Working for People
with Sight Loss**

18%

82%

About 18 percent of people using NCBI's services are completely blind, while 82 percent have varying degrees of usable vision.



Here are some basic techniques to help you guide a person with a vision impairment.

Sighted Guide

When a person who is vision impaired requires assistance from a sighted person to move from one place to another, a popular method is the “sighted guide” technique. Using this approach, the person with impaired vision holds on to the sighted person’s arm as they walk along. It is important for the sighted person to lead by walking slightly ahead.

Different people will have their own preferences about how they like to be guided. This leaflet suggests some guidelines that can be helpful, but it is always best to ask individuals which method they are most comfortable with.

How to guide a person with a vision impairment

1. Making contact

- Speak to make contact, introduce yourself.
- Ask the person if they require assistance and if so, ask how they wish to be assisted.
- If the person requests the sighted guide technique then ask which side they wish to be guided on, stand alongside the person and let them take your arm.
- If the person is seated allow them to stand up unassisted unless they request your help.

2. Correct guiding position

- The person takes hold of your arm just above the elbow, four fingers on the inside, thumb on the outside; the grip should be firm.
- You should keep your arm relaxed and close to the side of your body.
- You should remain half a step ahead of the person you are guiding.
- Give brief but clear verbal instructions, mention appropriate hazards and say if there are steps or kerbs up or down.
- If you have to leave the person you're guiding at any time, let them know and leave them in contact with a solid object, such as a wall.

Correct guiding position





Narrow spaces

3. Narrow spaces

- You may need to walk single file when moving through crowds or narrow spaces. Put your guiding arm behind your back, the person with a vision impairment straightens out their arm and walks directly behind you.

4. Going through doors

- Approach the door with the person you are guiding on the hinge side. Use your guiding arm to open the door. The person with a vision impairment can use their free hand to take the door handle from you, then find the handle on the other side of the door, and close it behind you both.

Going through doors



5. Changing Sides

- If the person you are guiding is not on the hinge side, as you approach a door, ask them to change sides. He or she will side-step behind you, taking your other elbow with their other hand.
- To facilitate this, bend your free elbow and point it out behind your back, making it easier for the person with vision impairment to locate.

6. Steps

- Always approach steps and stairs straight on, not diagonally.
- Stop or pause when you reach a step or kerb and say “step down” or “step up”.
- If the step is higher or lower than usual, warn the person you are guiding.



Steps and Kerbs

7. Stairs

- Tell the person you are guiding that you are approaching stairs and whether they are going up or down.
- Approach the stairs so that the free hand of the person you are guiding is at the handrail, and explain whether the rail is above or below their hand.
- Always say when you have reached the top or bottom of the stairs, and pause for a moment.
- If the handrail is on the left and the person with the vision impairment is on the right, change sides as before.

8. Getting into a car

- Say which way the car is facing, and place the person's hand on the door handle. They should then be able to manage alone.



Stairs

9. Sitting on a Chair

- Grip the back of the chair so that the person you are guiding can feel where it is. The person can then use your arm to guide them into the seat.
- If the back of the chair is against a wall, it may be easier to walk towards it in such a way that the person's leg brushes gently against the seat of the chair.
- Let the person sit down unaided; never push anyone backwards into a chair.

For more information or for practical training in how to guide a person with impaired vision contact NCBI on 1850 33 43 53 or visit www.ncbi.ie

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If you or someone you know has problems with their sight, contact NCBI on LoCall 1850 33 43 53 or through our website www.ncbi.ie.

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