Be a Visual Impairment Accessibility Champion. The Essential Guide!

Respecting Independence

- Be open - Ask questions, and treat people with the same respect you'd want in return.
- Be mindful - Some people need more assistance, some prefer less. Your help may be appreciated by one visually impaired person (VIP) and declined by another. Always ask.
- Be respectful – people are all different and will require varying levels of assistance. Always ask what works best for each individual rather than making assumptions.

Meeting and Greeting

- Be yourself and speak naturally.
- Introduce yourself even if you have met before e.g. “Hello Ava, I’m Jane”.
- If you meet in a different setting, introduce yourself and mention where you know each other from, e.g., “Hello Jane, I’m Sarah-Ann from Line Dancing.
- It is thoughtless to expect a visually impaired person to recognise you by voice alone. Don’t ask them to guess who you are.
- Address the visually impaired person directly, not the person they are with.
- Announce when you are entering a room. Announce when you are leaving the room; nobody wants to be talking to thin air.
- Consent - Ask if the person needs assistance, and how you could provide it. Respect their decision to decline your offer and don’t take it personally.

Make the Environment Work for Visually Impaired People

- Describe seating arrangements – eg. “You’re at a table with the door behind you, Ahmed is on your left and the Mayor is on your right.”
- Describe the space – A visually impaired person will appreciate knowing the position of doors, windows and emergency exits. Do not rely on pointing!
- Let the person know where you’ve placed things. eg “Your tea is in front of your left hand.” They might want you to put their hand on the cup. Always ask. eg “Would you like me to guide your hand to the cup?”
- Do not move someone’s personal items, such as bags or coats, without asking. If they are a trip hazard or at risk of damage, ask for permission and where they would like them placed.
- Check lighting – Light can cause glaring for some people and be too dark for others. Ask “Is this light comfortable for you?”
- **Be Glare Aware** –Bright sunlight or spotlights on a person’s face or document can cause discomfort or make text unreadable. If you notice this, offer to adjust blinds, curtains, dim the lights, or suggest a different seat.
- **Be sound aware** – If you’re using a microphone, let the person know where you’re standing to avoid them facing the loudspeaker rather than facing you.

Sighted Guiding

- Ask the visually impaired person if they would like you to guide them.
- Always ask for consent before touching a person. **Offer them your arm** for sighted guiding.
- Do not grab the person or push them along in front of you.
- Always ask for consent before touching a person, unless there is an immediate danger.
- The elbow is a respectful place to touch someone if you need to get their attention, especially for women.

Guide Dogs: Supporting VIPs & Their Dogs

- Offer a comfort break – The guide dog may need a toilet break after the journey to your venue; ask if you can help.
- Have you considered a designated dog toilet area?
- A visually impaired person with a guide dog may prefer an end table to give their dog space to sit.
- Be mindful of noise – Sudden sounds can startle guide dogs (and visually impaired people). Let people know if there's likely to be a loud noise.
- Guide dogs should be on a lead in most indoor public spaces. If a guide dog is wandering, return it to its owner.
- Theatres - Some people prefer their guide dog to be looked after by a volunteer in another room during a performance, while others find their dogs get anxious when separated from them. Always ask the guide dog user what works best for them.
- When the harness is up, the dog is working. Never call, touch, or distract the dog – they are focused on keeping their VIP safe. Always ask the owner first.
- When the harness is down, the dog is not working, always ask before petting the dog.
- **Never feed a guide dog – ever!** If they get sick, the guide dog user loses essential support, and vet bills are expensive.

What Not To Do

- A visually impaired person is not invisible. Ignoring a visually impaired person or addressing their companion or dog instead is thoughtless – Talk to them directly.
- Moving personal items without telling the person – Imagine your panic of finding your bag or coat missing.
- Walking away silently – Let the person/people know if you're leaving so they're not left talking to thin air.
- Shouting – Sight loss doesn't mean hearing loss!
- Assuming someone can't understand you and unintentionally making them feel belittled.

Remember:

- Be open - Ask questions, and treat people with the same respect you'd want in return.
- Be mindful - Some people need more assistance, some prefer less. Your help may be appreciated by one person and declined by another. Always ask.
- Be respectful - people are all different and will require varying levels of assistance. Always ask what works best for each individual, rather than making assumptions.

Thank you to Sandwell Visually Impaired for funding the creation of this PDF.