

MOBILITY INFORMATION

HOW TO GUIDE A VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILD

Introduction

Sighted guide technique refers to a method by which a visually impaired person and a sighted person can walk together comfortably. It can be used to help a blind or visually impaired person move through space safely and efficiently.

The child may have low vision or be blind. Most children who have reduced vision move about independently for the majority of time but may need assistance in dark, unfamiliar areas, crossing roads, to manoeuvre around obstacles or if their vision fluctuates.

Making contact

When you are going to offer sighted guide assistance, ask "Would you like to take my hand/arm?"

Normal Grip

The visually impaired person should grasp your arm just above the elbow with fingers on the inside of your arm and their thumb on the outside

The standard grasp is often too high for smaller children, so it may be best if they grasp your wrist or hold your hand. This will give both of you greater comfort and a sense of control.

If the visually impaired person is very tall, they should place their hand on the guides' shoulder.

For children with poor balance or who are frail you may wish to link arms for added support.

Setting Off

Hold your arm in a relaxed manner. Be careful not to let your arm wander. The visually impaired child should proceed half a step behind you. Do not drag the young person but allow them to follow your body movements. Ask the child to push on your arm to initiate forward.

Negotiating narrow spaces

In a busy crowd, or confined space, you may need to walk single file. Move your arm around to the middle of your back, keeping your arm straight. The child will move behind your back, extending their own arm to allow enough distance to walk comfortably.

Changing sides

If the child needs to change sides to the other arm, the smoothest method is for the person guiding to move their arm backwards. The child runs his/her hand along the guides back (maintaining contact) to the other side, then locates the other arm.

Changing direction

This simple technique is needed in small places such as shopping aisles or forgetting something and turning round. Just turn around, face each other and allow the child to take your other arm

Steps/Kerbs and stairs

As you approach the step or stair square on, tell them whether the step/stair goes up or down. Pause long enough for her/him to find the first step. If there is one, encourage the child to use the hand rail.

Stay one step ahead and remember to always pause at the bottom or top of stairs.

Doors

For safety and consistency the following technique works best: The visually impaired child should be on the hinged side of the door. After opening the door, the person guiding can place the child's hand on the door (if she/he cannot follow verbal instructions) or child may slide her/his hand along the guide's to find the door handle. Make sure the child's hand is in a safe position on the door. The guide opens the door, allowing the child to take control to open the door. For heavy doors the child may require assistance.