

Sighted Guide Technique

The use of a sighted guide is a means of assisting a visually impaired person to move from one location to another. Although it is most commonly used with adults and older children, some adapted techniques have been developed for use with young children. Although sighted guide technique may appear to place the visually impaired person in a dependent position, it may actually be encouraging independence; the visually impaired person can orient and move more confidently when accompanied by a sighted guide, since both verbal (guide's oral descriptions/commentary) and non-verbal information (sense of coordinated body movements, walking-surface sensory feed back) are available to the visually impaired person. Some guidelines for using sighted guide technique follow:

1. Be sure to ask the visually impaired person if assistance is needed. Some visually impaired people prefer to use their own mobility techniques.
2. Never grab the visually impaired person's arm; allow him/her to hold your upper arm above the elbow.
3. Walk at a natural and relaxed pace, providing any descriptive advance warnings as needed (e.g., "We're approaching some steps going down." or "There's a one-person doorway just ahead.").
4. Just before passing through narrow, one-person spaces (e.g., doorways, crowded halls), the sighted guide should reposition his/her held arm behind his/her back. This signals the visually impaired person to walk behind the guide. When the narrow space has been passed through, the guide should bring his/her arm back to the original position at his/her side, signaling the visually impaired person that it is safe to resume a side-by-side walking position.
5. The guide should pause just before going up or down stairs, and again at landings. It is also wise for the guide to be one step ahead of the visually impaired person, to minimize tripping over each other's feet. This also allows advance warning of the end of the steps.
6. Verbal descriptions of approaching terrain changes are helpful (e.g., pavement to grass or gravel, slopes or ramps, curbs).
7. To seat a guided person in a chair, either guide him/her to the front, side, or back of the chair and stop when the guided person's leg touches the chair, or place the guided person's hand on the back of the chair and allow him/her to orient independently. Verbal descriptions also help ("You have someone sitting on each side of your chair." or "This is like a movie theater seat.").