

# Simple Do's And Don'ts

## for Interacting with a Person Who Is Blind or a Person Who has a Severe Visual Impairment



**DON'T** be ill at ease. I'm an ordinary person who happens to be blind. You don't have to use some "politically correct" term, like "sight challenged", or avoid using the word blind. Keep it simple and honest. I'll discuss blindness with you if you're curious, but it's an old story to me. I have so many other interests that we could talk about, just like you.

**DON'T** pity me and don't talk about the "wonderful compensations" of blindness. My sense of smell, taste, touch and hearing did not improve when I lost my eyesight. I might rely on them more and, therefore, may get more information through these senses than you do--that's all.

**DON'T** worry about using language like "see" and "look", etc. I use those words all the time myself. I'm always glad to see a friend.

**DON'T** raise your voice when you are speaking to me. Unless I tell you otherwise, my eyesight has not affected my ability to hear what others are saying.

**DO** tell me if you have just approached or are leaving my presence. Almost everyone who is blind has had the embarrassing experience of talking to someone who doesn't answer because they have walked away. I want to know who is in the room with me. Speak when you enter and announce your name, "Hi, this is Pam." Introduce me to the others. Include children and tell me if there are any animals present.

**DO** use very specific words for communicating direction. "Over there" doesn't help if I can't see in which direction you are pointing. Instead, DO use language like, "The telephone is on the right side of the desk." or "The restaurant is about 50 feet ahead, on the left."



State of New Jersey

Phil Murphy, Governor | Sheila Oliver, Lt. Governor



Department of Human Services

Sarah Adelman, Commissioner



▶ **DON'T** grab my arm if you want to help me. I may use a long white cane or guide dog to walk independently - or - I may ask to take your arm so that you may assist me as my navigator. I'll hold onto your arm just above the elbow and keep a half step behind you to anticipate curbs and steps. This is called "sighted guide."

▶ **DO** tell me if we are about to go up or down a flight of stairs. You can let me know where the banister is either verbally or by placing my hand on it. When you need to show me to a chair, place my hand on the back of the chair. I can handle it from there.

▶ **DON'T** distract my guide dog while we are working together. It would be appreciated if you would ask me if you may speak to or pet the dog while it is not working (is not in its harness).

▶ **DON'T** leave doors to rooms and cabinets open or leave obstacles in walkways. They are a hazard for me.

▶ **DO** offer to read the menu (with prices, if appropriate) if a Braille or large print menu is unavailable when we are dining together.

▶ **DON'T** respond to our server if they ask you what I want-- "Cream in the coffee? -- let them ask me. I will not have trouble with ordinary table skills. Letting me know where the items on the table and even the food on my plate is positioned might be helpful. Imagine the face of a clock, "Your potatoes are at 4:00, your string beans are at 6:00... etc."

▶ **DO** ask me if I would like assistance:  
"How can I help you?"-- Sometimes your help may be declined but please don't be offended. It just means that at that specific time, I am handling things just fine, but, I would surely be appreciative of your help at another time. If I am your houseguest, show me all the exits, bathroom, closet, dresser, window--the light switch too. I like to know whether lights are on or off.

▶ **DO** contact the **NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired** if you, or someone you know is experiencing a visual impairment that affects your ability to perform daily life activities. Call Toll-Free: **877-685-8878** or contact us at: [AskCBVI@dhs.nj.gov](mailto:AskCBVI@dhs.nj.gov). Visit us at: [www.cbvi.nj.gov](http://www.cbvi.nj.gov)

## ▶ IMPORTANT OF ALL...

**Do remember** at all times that the only difference between you and a person who is blind is that they are unable to see through their eyes, what you see through yours. Beyond that, all other human qualities (physical, emotional, and mental) which make up a unique individual are present.

