

Understanding Visual Disabilities

Visual disabilities reduce a person's ability to see clearly.

There are many degrees of vision loss. Few people with vision loss are totally blind. Many have limited vision.

| Using words | |
|---|---|
| Don't say | Say |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the blind• the visually impaired | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a person who is blind• a person with vision loss |

Vision loss can restrict a person's ability to:

- **Read signs**
- **Locate landmarks**
- **See hazards.**

People with vision loss may use a guide dog or a white cane. Others may not. You may not always be able to tell if a person has vision loss.

Tips on how to interact with people with vision loss

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Never touch the person without asking permission, unless it's an emergency.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.
- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Don't touch or address service animals — they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.
- Don't just assume the person can't see you.
- Don't leave the person in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.