



Overview

Avoid the tendency to group all visual disabilities into one group and assume that everyone within the group needs the same services. The term *visual disabilities* covers a wide variety of conditions, including blindness, low vision, and color blindness. People with low vision have different challenges than people who are blind.

A person with low vision has some useful sight. However, low vision usually interferes with the performance of daily activities, such as reading or driving. Persons with low vision may need to use large print and have restrictions placed on their driving. A person with low vision may not recognize images at a distance or be able to differentiate between colors of similar hues. Those who are legally blind may only see light and dark images and may need to be inches away from objects to observe them properly.

Blind persons may use mobility aids, including canes and guide dogs. It is always best to *ask* the patron what you can do to assist, rather than assuming that help is needed.

Tips

- Speak in a normal tone of voice. Avoid yelling or speaking loudly to individuals with vision loss.
- Identify yourself and others with you. In a group setting, identify the person who you are addressing. Announce your comings and goings: don't leave a blind person talking to an empty chair.
- In a meeting, identify yourself when you begin speaking.
- Ask the patron, "How may I help you?"
- Speak directly to the patron, not through a sighted companion.
- Do not touch or pet a guide dog.
- When giving directions, use the clock's face as your basis: "The reference desk is about two feet ahead at three o'clock from where you're facing." Offer to escort the patron to his or her destination.
- When guiding a patron, offer your elbow for guidance. Do not grab the patron's arm or hand. Stand next to the patron and slightly ahead; then offer your arm. Describe your path, including obstacles and changes in the levels you are walking, such as stairs. If the path narrows, push your elbow back, so that the patron can walk directly behind you.
- Have material available in a variety of formats, and ask for format preferences, including large print, Braille, electronic text, and CD.
- Make sure your library is well lit for persons with low-vision and that signage incorporates high contrast, large print, and when possible Braille.

Useful Materials and Assistive Technologies

- Large-print books and magazines that have a typeface greater than font size 14
- Braille books and magazines (some with tactile graphics) available on loan from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (see “Resources,” below)
- Combination of print and Braille picture books that sighted individuals and Braille readers can enjoy together
- Various audiobook formats, such as cassette tapes, CDs, preloaded MP3 players (e.g., Playaway), downloadable audiobooks, and e-books
- Audio-described television programs (formatted to include a narration of events which are happening for which there isn’t a dialogue) and movies on DVD

Collection Development Resources

Electronic, Digital Format

Bookshare

www.bookshare.org

This not-for-profit organization offers members encrypted downloadable books, magazines and other media in digital format . A registration fee is required for persons who are not students.

Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Library

www.cnib.ca/library

Supported by the Canadian Institute for the Blind, the library provides books, magazines, and newspapers in French, Spanish and other languages. Also provides an electronic meeting place for registered patrons as well as books in large print and Braille books.

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS)

www.loc.gov/nls

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) is the primary resource for locating information relating to vision and physical disabilities. In addition to providing information they provide digital books and playback machines to qualified U.S. citizens of all ages. It is useful to locate your NLS Library for the Blind and Visually Impaired as staff at this library can provide advice and help connect staff with patrons who are blind or have a visual impairment. Likewise, staff at your library can refer patrons needing this specialized service to the NLS library. The NLS libraries also provide Braille reading materials for patrons.

Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D)

www.rfbd.org

This nonprofit organization for individuals with print disabilities provides technical and scholarly materials in special formats. A specific playback unit is required. A sign-up fee is required and is determined with a sliding scale.

Print/Braille Book Resources

National Braille Press (NBP)

www.nbp.org

The National Braille Press publishes low-cost books for children and adults which would make useful additions to collections which are used by Braille readers.

Seedlings Braille Books for Children

www.seedlings.org

Produces low-cost Braille books for children and young readers.

Resource Technology

American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) *Accessworld*

www.afb.org

Accessworld is an on-line publication provides current information on assistive technology

Media Access Group at WGBH

<http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/mag/description.html>

WGBH is the leader in regard to providing access for all to media such as movies and television programs, WGBH provides instructions on how to do audio description as well as serving as a resource for DVDs which are audio-described.

This tip sheet, revised in 2010, is one in a series developed by the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, a division of the American Library Association. See www.ala.org/ascla.