

Sight Loss
Friendly Church:
**Blind
Etiquette-
how to
greet a VIP!**



from TORCH TRUST

Here are some 'dos and don'ts' for interacting with blind and partially sighted people. As always, when in doubt, ask and never assume.

But before we go into the dos and don'ts, what's the correct terminology to use?

If you don't know whether someone is blind or partially sighted, it's fine to use visually impaired or vision impaired as umbrella terms. These are often shortened to VI or VIP. BPS, short for blind and partially sighted people is also fine to use, though you'd probably ask if someone was visually or vision impaired or VI rather than BPS. The RNIB uses sight impaired or severely sight impaired. The term blind is not offensive. Especially if the person is actually blind and uses that term about themselves. Sight loss is also an acceptable term, though people who have been blind or partially sighted from birth don't tend to associate with it.

And now for those dos and don'ts.



Dos

- Always introduce yourself unless you're very familiar with the person. It's better to be reminded who they're speaking to even if they do recognise your voice rather than being unsure.
- Always tell the person that you're leaving, even if that's interrupting the conversation.
- Always tell them when you've returned. No need to reintroduce yourself at that point.
- It's fine to ask questions about how they do things, but remember to ask open-ended questions starting with "how", "what" and "where" rather than closed-ended ones. "How do you use a computer?" instead of "Can you use a computer?"
- Offer help, but let the person decide whether they want it. Don't be offended if it's declined.
- With the help of today's technology and learned skills, blind and partially sighted people can do a lot of things independently and live full lives. It may sometimes be hard for a sighted person to understand how they do or cope with certain things, but accept they're totally fine with it.





- Remember that if you've met one blind person, you've only met one blind person. Don't let that inform future encounters with other blind or partially sighted people.
- Ask if someone would like to be guided and how.
- Make the person feel that their presence is wanted in different situations and not merely tolerated. Say things like "We'd love you to stay for coffee", invite them to an event, give them a task you know they can handle by saying "Can you help with this?"

Don'ts

- Don't simply assume a person can't do something because you couldn't imagine doing it without full sight.
- Don't grab a blind or partially sighted person in any situation unless they're about to fall off a cliff or down onto train tracks. Instead, ask if they need help, or if and how they'd like to be guided.
- Don't ask if there's "Something wrong" with other family members. If you're curious, wait until you have a rapport with them and then ask if anyone else in the family is visually impaired, if you must.
- Don't reduce their blindness to small talk. Similar to the point above, wait until you feel like you have a rapport with the person. "Hi, I'm Jim. Nice to meet you. Have you always been blind?" isn't the best conversation starter.
- Don't correct a blind person who says "It's nice to see you" or "I'm looking at going to...". It's everyday terminology that everyone uses.
- Don't correct a blind person who refers to themselves as blind.
- Don't say "You don't look blind" as a compliment. This suggests a negative stereotype. "I didn't realise you were blind" is a different matter and much more acceptable.

Guide Dog Etiquette

- Don't interact with a working dog by petting, calling out the dog's name, or giving the dog commands. A guide dog should only hear commands from its handler.
- Don't allow children to interact with the dog. Do teach children the difference between a pet and a service dog.
- Don't allow your pets to interact with a working guide dog.
- Don't feed the dog anything without the handler's permission, especially not table scraps. Guide dogs must maintain an ideal weight and fitness level, not to mention food being a natural distraction from work.
- Don't attempt to guide, steer, or hold a person navigating with a guide dog. Do let the dog work.
- If the dog is out of harness, do ask permission to pet the dog or to allow children to pet the dog. If the dog is resting, do allow it to rest without disturbing it.
- Walking together? Right-handed handlers often work their dogs on their left side. Do walk on the handler's right side, a few paces behind. Walking on the left side (the dog side) may distract the dog.



[Reproduced from Southeastern Guide Dogs (US): www.guidedogs.org/blog/guide-dog-etiquette]