

After the service, January 2023



from TORCH TRUST

After the service



Sight Loss Friendly Church

Equipping churches to enable blind and partially sighted people to contribute to church life..



After the service

This guide discusses best practices for including a blind or partially sighted person after a church service. Please also check out our document on being inclusive before the service. For more in-depth information, check out our ‘Focus On’ YouTube video: ‘Before and After the Service’.

Fellowship after the service is a great time to make new friends, catch up with old ones and respond to calls to action made during the service. But for a blind or partially sighted person, this can be a stressful time, especially if they're in an unfamiliar setting. However, there's a lot that can be done to make this time meaningful and easier to navigate.

When returning to the visually impaired person after the service, remind them who you are and ask whether they still require the help they thought they needed at the start. They may have realised during the service that they do not need the help after all, or may have made friends with someone nearby who has offered to help instead.

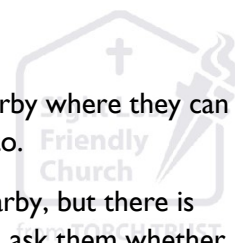
Actively encourage them to stay for coffee (and other refreshments if available): use phrases such as "We'd love you to stay" rather than "Would you like to stay". This is a particularly vulnerable time for a visually impaired person as they may feel by now that they have been too much of a burden already and do not wish to put you to any more trouble.

Equally, however, do not labour the point. If they express a wish to leave the building, guide or direct them politely to the exit.

Try to remember how they were guided at the start of the service and use the same techniques unless instructed otherwise. This further demonstrates to them that they are valued, as you have taken the time to remember something about them.

They may need assistance to find their coat or belongings when they leave, especially if they were left somewhere other than at their seat.





At coffee time, it is usually most pragmatic to find a seat for the visually impaired person, sit them down, and then get them a drink and bring it to them. You should ask if this is the course of action that they would like you to take but, especially if they're severely visually impaired, it is appropriate to suggest that you would find it easier not to have to guide them when in the presence of hot drinks! This may assuage any discomfort that they might have around, for example, appearing lazy or incapable.

Make sure you ask them what drink they would like, and point out anything out of the ordinary. This could include, for example, telling them if there is something special about the coffee, or telling a regular visually impaired congregation member that cakes are also available and asking if they would like one with their drink. Make sure that they are aware of the full range of refreshments available, and don't forget to ask whether they would like milk and sugar!

If the visually impaired person is new to the church, try to seat them with people who are likely to be friendly and engage them in conversation. Otherwise, ask them whether there is anywhere in particular they would like to sit, or anyone in particular they wish to speak to. Do not be surprised if the answer is non-committal most weeks – they may not be able to answer properly as they may not know who is in the room – but continue to ask the question anyway, as occasionally they may wish to find a particular person, perhaps in response to a notice earlier in the service.

When bringing a drink to the visually impaired person, make sure they know where you have placed the cup. If they take it in their hands, make

them aware of somewhere nearby where they can safely put it down if they wish to.

If there is nowhere suitable nearby, but there is table space available elsewhere, ask them whether they would like a table, but do not automatically assume that a table is required.

If there is food available (e.g. at a bring and share lunch) it is usually not sufficient just to ask a visually impaired person what they would like, as they are not likely to know:

- what is available, and
- in what quantities.

Having established that they would like food in the first place, it can be more expedient to ask whether there is anything in particular that they do not want. The answer to this question will allow you to evaluate whether you need to itemise everything that is available, or possibly to offer a high level overview of what is available.

To determine portion sizes, ask them whether, overall, they would like a lot of food, a little, or somewhere in between. It is generally not useful to ask about portion sizes of specific items of food, as they're not likely to be able to make a fair judgement. If they do have strong preferences in this regard, they are likely to have been vocalised already.

If their preferences are complex, and they are not with you in the queue already, you could suggest that they come with you to where the food is being served.

If you need to leave a visually impaired person, tell them you are leaving if it is not obvious from the conversation, and point out (or introduce them to) other people nearby who are staying put.

