

Courtesy Rules of Blindness

When you meet me, don't be ill at ease. It will help both of us if you remember these ten simple points of courtesy:

1. I'm an ordinary person, who happens to be blind. You can talk to me as you would anyone else—no need to raise your voice. If you have a question, please address me directly rather than asking my companion.
2. I may use a long white cane or a guide dog to walk independently. If I use a guide dog, please don't pet, feed, or play with my dog without my permission. If I'm in an unfamiliar place, I may ask you for directions or assistance. Please don't grab my arm, my cane, or my dog. If I need to and if you don't mind, I'll ask to take your arm just above the elbow and keep a half-step behind to anticipate curbs and steps.
3. When I am in a room, I like to know who else is there. Please speak or introduce yourself when you enter.
4. Please keep in mind that a door left partially open, particularly to an overhead cabinet or a car, is a potential hazard to me.
5. I do not have trouble with ordinary table skills. At meals, I can serve myself and pass items to other diners, so please don't reach over or past me. Just let me know what's being offered and I'll take it from there.
6. There is no need to avoid words like "see" or "look." I use them too—for example, I watch television.
7. Blindness is just the loss of sight. My sense of smell, touch, and/or hearing did not improve when I became blind. I simply rely on them more than you might and, therefore, may gather more information through those senses than you do.
8. If I'm your house guest, there is no need to be extra attentive or to move any furniture; I'll use my cane and other senses to find things or I will ask for your help.
9. I'll discuss blindness with you if you're curious, but feel free to talk to me about anything that interests you. I have as many other interests as you do.
10. In all 50 states, the law requires drivers to yield the right of way when they see my extended white cane or guide dog. Only the blind may legally carry white canes. Normally I can hear the sound of traffic and will behave like any other pedestrian. If you drive a hybrid or electric vehicle, I may not hear your car approach, so exercise caution and use the horn if needed. You see more blind persons today walking alone, not because there are more of us, but because we have learned to make our own way.