

Pittsburgh Action Against Rape

Fact Sheet on Survivors who are visually impaired or blind

What is a visual impairment?

A person with 20/200 vision or less with best corrective lenses is considered to be legally blind. As with every type of disability, the degree and types of vision loss varies widely. Functionally, this can mean a person may have spots in their visual field, tunnel vision, or only light perception.

What is Blindness?

A very small percentage of people with visual impairments are actually considered to be totally blind. Total blindness means, functionally, that there is no vision at all, not even light perception.

When providing services to someone who is visually impaired or blind:

- ◆ Offer written materials in alternative formats such as large print, Braille, audio tape, computer disk or websites with alternative formats.
- ◆ If forms or other written materials are not available in the format a person prefers, you may offer to read them aloud. When providing assistance in filling out a form, it is helpful to read the entire form first for understanding before going through step by step.
- ◆ If a person has a visual impairment, ask them about their preferred lighting situation. Some people like bright lights, but can't take too much glare. Some people see best on a cloudy day. It is easier for some to discern a high visual contrast (i.e., standing in front of a black background).
- ◆ When entering a new location, it may be helpful to describe the space generally (size, where the doors are, etc) as well as to provide verbal orientation to the bathroom and other facilities.
- ◆ Always verbally announce your name as you approach and introduce any new person who joins you. Do not assume the person remembers your voice. Always inform the person when you are leaving the room.
- ◆ Do not be afraid to use terms such as, 'Looks like rain', or 'Do you see what I mean?' These are normal words used in every day conversation will not hurt the feelings of someone who is visually impaired.

- ◆ Before providing assistance to someone who is blind or visually impaired ask if they would like a sighted guide and which technique they prefer to use. Generally a person with a visual disability prefers to walk slightly behind the guide with their hand cupped around the back of the guide's bent elbow. Describe any obstacles in the path with specific directions (i.e., 'to your left' rather than 'over there'). If you are leading a person to a seat, help her locate it by placing her hand on the back of the chair. From there, she will be able to self-orient and sit down.
- ◆ Ask whether the person can get to your location independently or if he would like assistance with transportation.
- ◆ Service animals are entitled to go anywhere a person with a visual impairment goes. When the animal is in a harness it is working and should not be petted, fed, or played with.
- ◆ It may take additional time to complete tasks or interviews in order to provide necessary accommodations.
- ◆ If all else fails, just ask!

**For more information regarding blindness and visual impairments,
contact the American Foundation for the Blind at 1-800-232-5463, or
www.afb.org**

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