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## **Fact Sheet 7**

## **General Suggestions for Assisting People with Vision Loss and Blindness**

As we are all different, there is no one-size-fits-all kind of help. You can simply ask the person, how you can best help. *“Excuse me Liz, is there anything I can do to help you today? ”*If a person has experienced recent vision loss or deteriorating vision, they may be experiencing increased challenges. You may be able to help by offering practical help or a listening ear. While acceptance of vision loss can take time, many people remain independent by learning how to adapt an activity and by gaining new skills. ‘Talking technology’ is now readily available on computers, phones and other devices and the range of programs and Apps is ever growing.

1. Think Bigger, Bolder, Brighter. Good lighting, high contrast and increasing magnification size can help. Offering seating for the person with their back to a window will reduce the effects of indoor glare. Use contrasting colours where possible, a white plate on a dark coloured placemat, a coloured mug on a white table.
2. Good planning and organisation can make an activity more comfortable for all. Obtain information before going out into the community by looking up café menus and operating times. This can provide an opportunity to help with choices before arriving in a noisy or crowded place.
3. If you are helping someone in their home for the first time, announce your name and the reason for your visit clearly before entering. Behave politely and as you would in any other home. For many the placement of household items and furniture is vital for easy movement and access around the home. It is therefore important to ensure items are not moved to different locations without first discussing with the person.
4. If you are helping with transport to a new location, look up parking options and allow additional travel time for getting around safely in the community.
5. If you are at an event, offer to ring for a taxi and assist the person to wait in the designated area for the taxi to arrive. Once arriving at their destination, Taxi drivers may assist to guide a person to an entrance door.
6. When visiting a new location, it can be helpful to describe the layout and how things are done. In a Pub, you can give general information about the layout of tables, the location of restrooms (use the clock face), bar/s and EFTPOS machines. You might help by describing what is on the menu, ordering and table service procedures. Ask if the person needs assistance to order their meal at a counter or getting a drink if table service is not available.

**PTO**

1. In group situations verbally introduce others by name and where they are sitting or standing. Say the person’s name before speaking to avoid confusion. If a shared food plate is offered, it may be necessary for you to serve the person with vision loss, if they are unable to see the food items.
2. When helping with grocery shopping you may need to announce what is located in each aisle and point out any ‘Specials’. When using a grocery shopping list, read the list back to the person to ensure all items have been gathered. Some people will hold the supermarket trolley to help them walk safely along aisles with you.
3. For some, there is no ability to locate and take a ticket at a supermarket deli counter nor see the ticket number or the digital screen. Some businesses also have a ticket system therefore a person with blindness will need some verbal assistance to ensure they are served, in turn.
4. If helping with toilets and restrooms, it can be helpful to describe the layout. “Toilet cubicles are located on the left of the entry doorway and hand basins are on your right”. Include the location of taps, soap dispenser and hand dryer.
5. Moving forward in a queue without bumping into others can be challenging with vision loss, you can help by using Guiding skills.
6. People with vision impairment need to remember many more details than sighted people. You can help by doing a visual check when out and about to ensure nothing has been left behind, such as a coat or bag of shopping.
7. If making hot drinks, do not over fill the cup or mug. Try to avoid placing a hot drink near the edge of a table, or where it can spill.
8. Keep room and cupboard doors completely open or closed and push chairs in under tables to avoid trips, falls and injuries.
9. People with vision loss may need extra time for their vision to adjust to changes in lighting as when entering an indoor environment from the outdoors. Guiding skills or simple verbal prompts can be useful to prevent trips and falls.
10. The advent of touch screens, quieter cars and the installation of bollards for protecting pedestrians all present new challenges for people with vision loss and blindness when navigating their community.
11. A dog guide is highly trained to do important work, but not everyone chooses to use a dog guide, for a range of personal reasons.
12. People with vision loss and blindness can enjoy playing games. Large print and braille playing cards, bingo sets, board games are available. Computer games are also accessible. Some blind people play golf with the help of a companion or caddy, who verbally assists them to line up their golf club with the ball, prior to swinging their golf club.
13. People who are suffering anxiety and depression might be encouraged to tell a family member and/or contact their GP or a number of mental health services in Australia, for professional health care.

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