

# Sighted Guide Techniques Help You Help Others



*Empowering visually impaired people to live fulfilling lives*

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## SAN DIEGO CENTER

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## SANTA BARBARA CENTER

2031 De La Vina Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93105  
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Braille Institute® also offers Community Outreach programs at more than 350 locations throughout Southern California. Call the nearest regional center for locations.

There are many efficient, easy-to-learn ways to give meaningful assistance to someone who is visually impaired. For nearly a century, Braille Institute® has helped thousands of blind and visually impaired people of all ages develop the skills they need for effective *orientation* — the ability to identify their surroundings — and *mobility* — the ability to get from one location to another safely.

Many people who are blind or visually impaired are excellent travelers — either alone, using a white cane, or with a guide dog. Yet, especially when they find themselves in an unfamiliar environment, many appreciate assistance from a sighted guide. Even the most seasoned travelers occasionally use the services of a sighted guide to become better acquainted with unfamiliar areas or to maneuver around obstacles.

The sighted guide techniques outlined here will help make assisting a blind or visually impaired person easier, but they will not make you proficient. Sighted guide training is available at a Braille Institute center near you.

## Getting from here to there

If you meet a blind person who seems to be “off course” while crossing a street, perhaps out of the crosswalk, remember that most have been taught to respond to verbal instructions such as “go left” or “go right.” But be sure to use their left or right, not yours, if you are facing them!

## Making contact

When approaching someone who is blind, introduce yourself and ask whether he would like your help. Do not grab or pull at him. If he indicates that he would like assistance, verbally offer your arm and brush it against his.

## Grasp

The blind person should grasp your arm just above the elbow with her fingers on the inside near your waist and her thumb on the outside. The grasp must be firm to be maintained while walking, yet not so tight as to cause discomfort. If the grip is too tight, say so.

## Sighted Guide Techniques (continued)



**Grasp:** This technique allows you flexibility and freedom of motion with both of your hands and gives the blind person a sense of your body motion.



**Narrow-area Stance**



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### Support grasp

Some blind people are frail. Others have balance problems that make the standard grasp inadequate. Rather than holding your arm above the elbow, a blind person may prefer to link his arm with yours. This will decrease the space between the two of you and provide added support. To accommodate a blind person's unsteadiness, you likely will need to slow your walking pace.

### Children's grasp

The standard grasp often is too high for children, so it may be best to have them grasp your wrist or hold your hand. This gives you and the child greater comfort and sense of control.

### Stance

Hold your arm relaxed and steady at your side. The blind person's arm is at a 90-degree angle and held close to her side. She should proceed by being one half-step behind you. She will follow your movements. Do not steer her.

### Narrow-area stance

When approaching an area that is crowded or narrow, such as a doorway, move your forearm and hand so that they rest against the lower portion of your back, with your elbow at a 90-degree angle and your palm facing outward. The blind person will take this cue, slide her hand down to your wrist and move directly behind you at arm's length while still maintaining a firm grip. Take smaller steps and slow down as you move through the narrow area. For comfort, have the blind person move her grasp from above your elbow to your wrist. After walking through the narrow area, return your arm to the guide position and walk normally.

### Doors

When approaching a door, assume the narrow-area stance and tell the blind person in which direction the door opens. This allows him to help you by holding the door with his free hand while passing through it. Do not try to turn around to hold the door open. This is awkward and diverts your attention.

## Sighted Guide Techniques (continued)

### Taking a seat

When possible, approach a chair from the front or side. Tell the blind person he is at the front or side, and slowly bring him up to it until his knees or shins touch the seat. Say whether the chair has arms. Place your hand on the chair back and let him follow your arm down to locate it with the hand he has been grasping your arm with. Allow him to seat himself. Do not help him physically or move the chair or other furniture unless he asks you to. Let him know if there is a table. Unless they are frail or otherwise disabled, blind people are capable of getting up from a chair without help. Once they are standing, use the correct stance and grasp techniques described above.

### Stairs

Six feet before reaching the first step, tell the person you are guiding that you are approaching stairs. Approach her directly and in such a way that her free hand is closest to the rail. Mention whether the stairs go up or down and how many steps there are. Pause to allow her to locate the first step and the railing. Always remain a step ahead and proceed as you normally would. Remain to the right-hand side of stairs to avoid colliding with others. Pause at each landing to allow the blind person to stand beside you and to cue her that there are no more steps until you begin to move again.

Tell her when you have reached the top or bottom of the stairs.

### What's next?

These techniques are useful in a variety of circumstances. Family and friends often use them in daily situations such as shopping, dining out or other community activities. Co-workers find these techniques helpful when one of their colleagues is legally blind. Healthcare professionals and other caregivers also benefit from knowing these techniques.

You may have received this fact sheet during a seminar, speaking engagement or specialized in-service training session provided by Braille Institute. A vast array of other presentations are also provided free of charge to individuals or groups.

Formal sighted guide training is available. Please contact the Braille Institute center nearest you Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.



**Stairs Technique**

Braille Institute is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to eliminate barriers to a fulfilling life caused by blindness and severe sight loss.



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