

Serving the Needs of Individuals with Visual Impairments in Healthcare Settings: Guidelines for Food Service Staff

Introduction

- Terms associated with individuals with visual impairments include, but are not limited to: blind, low vision, legally blind, and deafblind.
 - Vision is a continuum from total blindness to those who have significant usable vision.
 - An individual's usable vision can fluctuate throughout the day.
 - Ask the individual how they would like to be identified, for example as blind or visually impaired.

Tools and Challenges

- Tools an individual may use to access print include: braille, a magnifier, a monocular, text to speech software, and screen enlargement software.
- To move through the environment an individual might use a white cane, a guide dog, or a human guide.
- Individuals with visual impairments may have difficulty with navigation. They may not: see signs, see where you are pointing, and/or be able to read a map visually.
- Challenges with accessing information may include: not seeing a name printed on a badge or uniform, completing or accessing paperwork, or hearing information accurately (especially if the individual is deafblind).

Dos and Don'ts That Show Respect

- **DO NOT** grab or push the individual.
- **DO NOT** talk to others who are with the individual, **DO** talk to them directly.
- **DO** identify yourself with your name and title, even if you have met before.
- **DO** ask if the individual needs assistance, **DO NOT** assume.
- **DO** use words like "look" and "see."
- **DO** ask the individual if they need a human guide. If they say they do, allow them to hold your arm above the elbow. Walk a half step in front of the individual.
- **DO** be yourself!

Strategies to Use When Taking a Food Order

- If there is a printed menu, ask if the individual needs assistance with the menu.
- If there are photos, offer to describe these to the individual.
- If the individual must write down their order or make a selection using a pen, offer to fill out the form for them.

Strategies to Use When Delivering Food

- Announce when you arrive and that you have a tray of food.
- Ask where the individual would like you to place the tray.
- Offer to describe what is on the tray and where each item is located. Avoid terms such as "here". Rather, "The juice is at the top right of the tray, the bread is on a plate just under it."

Strategies to Use in Public Dining Areas

- Ask the individual how you can assist them. They may appreciate having you carry their tray or help them locate an empty table.
- On a food line, offer to describe the food choices as the individual may not see a printed board, labels at the station, or the food itself.
- Ask if the individual needs assistance with the payment process. For example, they may not know where the cashier is located or the machine they need to use to swipe their card may not be accessible.
- Offer to describe what to do once one is done eating. For example, provide information about where to take dirty dishes or the location of a trashcan.
- Ask the individual if they would like to walk with you using human guide.
 - Allow the individual to take your arm above the elbow.
 - Walk a half a step in front of the individual so they can feel the movement of your body and anticipate what will occur next.
 - Offer to describe information such as approaching a staircase or a door.

