

The Courtesy Rules of Blindness

When you meet me, be comfortable. It will help both of us if you remember these simple points of courtesy:

1. I am an ordinary person who happens to be blind. You do not need to raise your voice or address me as if I were a child. Do not ask my spouse or friend if I want "cream in my coffee," ask me.
2. I may use a long white cane or dog guide to walk independently, or I may ask to take your arm. Let me decide. Please do not grab my arm. Let me take yours. I will stay a half-step behind to anticipate curbs and steps. If I am using a dog guide, please do not pet or call the animal as these distractions can cause the dog guide to make mistakes that endanger me.
3. I like to know who is in the room with me. Please speak to me when you enter, and introduce me to others. Include children and tell me if there is a cat or dog in the room.
4. A partially opened door to a room, cabinet or car can be a hazard to me. Please be considerate.
5. If the two of us are talking and something else catches your attention please verbally excuse yourself before leaving the conversation. Simply walking away when I am talking can leave me initially unaware that I am talking to no one (a truly embarrassing situation).
6. I have no trouble with ordinary table skills and can manage without help. If I need help, I will ask.
7. Do not avoid using words like "see." I use them too. I am usually glad to see you.
8. Please do not talk about the wonderful compensations of blindness. My sense of smell, touch and hearing did not improve when I became blind. I rely on them more and therefore may get more information through those senses, but that's all.
9. If I am your house guest, please show me around. I like to know where important things are: like the bathroom, closet, dresser, windows, etc. I am even interested in the light switches, tell me if the lights are on or off.
10. I will discuss blindness with you and answer all your questions if you are curious, but it's an old story to me. I have as many other interests as you.
11. If you see me around town and want to greet me, please address me by name and tell me who you are. This helps me identify you more quickly.
12. Do not think of me as "Just a blind person." I am just a *person* who happens to be blind. Blindness is not my only characteristic, it is just one of many features that make me who I am.
13. When you see me approaching in a hallway or other common area please do not stop talking to those around you or otherwise become silent. Doing so may cause me to bump into you as your silence does not warn me of your presence. Instead, keep talking as normal or say "hello" if you prefer.
14. If we are interacting individually or in a small group, please look my way when you speak to me. I am aware of your eye contact and its absence becomes annoying.

In all fifty states, the law requires drivers to yield the right of way when they see a white cane or dog guide. Only the blind may carry white canes. Certified dog guides (in harness) are allowed in all public places including: grocery stores, restaurants and hospitals. You see more blind persons today walking alone, not because there are more of us, but because more of us have learned to make our own way.

These points were compiled by the Michigan State University [Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities](#) with assistance from the [American Council of the Blind](#) and the [National Federation of the Blind](#). For more information contact RCPD at www.rcpd.msu.edu or (517) 884-RCPD.