

# ***The National Federation of the Blind***

## **The Courtesy Rules of Blindness**

When you meet me don't be ill at ease. It will help both of us if you remember these simple points of courtesy:

1. I'm an ordinary person, just blind. You don't need to raise your voice or address me as if I were a child. Don't ask my spouse what I want — "Cream in the coffee?" — ask me.
2. I may use a long white cane or a guide dog to walk independently; or I may ask to take your arm. Let me decide, and please don't grab my arm; let me take yours. I'll keep a half-step behind to anticipate curbs and steps.
3. I want to know who's in the room with me. Speak when you enter. Introduce me to the others. Include children, and tell me if there's a cat or dog.
4. The door to a room or cabinet or to a car left partially open is a hazard to me.
5. At dinner I will not have trouble with ordinary table skills
6. Don't avoid words like "see". I use them, too. I'm always glad to see you.
7. I don't want pity. But don't talk about the "wonderful compensations" of blindness. My sense of smell, touch, or hearing did not improve when I became blind. I rely on them more and, therefore, may get more information through those senses than you do — that's all.
8. If I'm your houseguest, show me the bathroom, closet, dresser, window — the light switch, too. I like to know if the lights are on.
9. I'll discuss blindness with you if you're curious, but it's an old story to me. I have as many other interests as you do.
10. Don't think of me as just a blind person. I'm just a person who happens to be blind.

In all 50 states, the law requires drivers to yield the right of way when they see my extended white cane. Only the blind may carry white canes. You see more blind persons today walking alone, not because there are more of us, but because we have learned to make our own way.

## **What To Do When You Meet A Sighted Person**

People who use their eyes to receive information about the world are called sighted people or "people who are sighted." Legal "sight" means any visual acuity greater than 20/200 in the better eye without correction or an angle of vision wider than 20 degrees. Sighted people enjoy rich full lives, working, playing and raising families. They run businesses, hold public office and teach your children!

### ***How Do Sighted People Get Around?!***

People who are sighted may walk or ride public transportation, but most choose to travel long distances by operating their own motor vehicles. They have gone through many hours of training to learn the "rules of the road" in order to further their independence. Once that road to freedom has been mastered, sighted people earn a legal classification and a "Driver's License" which allows them to operate a private vehicle safely and independently.

### ***How To Assist A Sighted Person***

Sighted people are accustomed to viewing the world in visual terms. This means that in many situations, they will not be able to communicate orally and may resort to pointing or other gesturing. Subtle facial expressions may also be used to convey feelings in social situations. Calmly alert the sighted person to his surroundings by speaking slowly, in a normal tone of voice. Questions directed at the sighted person help focus attention back on the verbal rather than visual communication.

At times, sighted people may need help finding things, especially when operating a motor vehicle. Your advance knowledge of routes and landmarks, particularly bumps in the road, turns and traffic lights, will assist the "driver" in finding the way quickly and easily. Your knowledge of building layouts can also assist the sighted person in navigating complex shopping malls and offices. Sighted people tend to be very proud and will not ask directly for assistance. Be gentle yet firm.

### ***How Do Sighted People Use Computers?!***

The person who is sighted relies exclusively on visual information. His or her attention span fades quickly when reading long texts. Computer information is presented in a "Graphical User Interface" or GUI. Coordination of hands and eyes is often a problem for sighted people, so the computer mouse, a handy device that slides along the desk top, saves confusing keystrokes. With one button, the sighted person can move around his or her computer screen quickly and easily. People who are sighted are not accustomed to synthetic speech and may have great difficulty understanding even the clearest synthesizer. Be patient and prepared to explain many times how your computer equipment works.

### ***How Do Sighted People Read?!***

Sighted people read through a system called "Print." This is a series of images drawn in a two dimensional plane. People who are sighted generally have a poorly developed sense of touch. Braille is completely foreign to the sighted person and he or she will take longer to learn the code and be severely limited by his or her existing visual senses. Sighted people cannot function well in low lighting conditions and are generally completely helpless in total darkness. Their homes are usually very brightly lit at great expense, as are businesses that cater to the sighted consumer.

### ***How Can I Support A Sighted Person?!***

People who are sighted do not want your charity. They want to live, work and play along with you. The best thing you can do to support sighted people in your community is to open yourself to their world. These Americans are vital contributing members to society. Take a sighted person to lunch today!