

Tip Sheet 14  
Library Accessibility: What You Need to Know:  
Blindness and Low Vision

### **Background**

Avoid the tendency to group all visual disabilities into one group and assume that everyone within the group needs the same services. People with low vision have different challenges than people who are blind.

A person with low vision has some useful sight. However, low vision usually interferes with the performance of daily activities, such as reading or driving. Persons with low vision may need to use large print, and have restrictions placed on their driving. A person with low vision may not recognize images at a distance or be able to differentiate between colors of similar hues. Those who are legally blind may only see light and dark images, and may need to be inches away from objects, in order to observe properly.

Blind persons devise alternative techniques such as using mobility aids, including canes and guide dogs. It is always best to ask the patron what you can do to assist, rather than assuming that help is needed.

### **Tips**

- Do not yell or speak loudly to individuals with vision loss.
- Identify yourself and others with you. In a group setting, identify the person who you are addressing. Announce your comings and goings, don't leave a blind person talking to an empty chair.
- Ask the patron, "How may I help you?"
- Speak directly to the patron, not through a sighted companion.
- Do not touch or pet a guide dog.
- When giving directions, use the clock face as your basis, "The reference desk is about two feet ahead at 3:00 from where you're facing." Offer to escort the patron to their destination.
- When guiding a patron offer your elbow for guidance. Do not grab the patron's arm or hand. Stand next to the patron and slightly ahead, then offer your arm. Describe your path, including obstacles and changes in the levels you are walking, such as stairs. If the path narrows, push your elbow back, so that the patron can walk directly behind you.

- Ask for format preferences, including large print, braille, electronic, and cassette tape.

### **Useful Material and Assistive Technologies**

- Large print books and magazines that have a type face greater than font size 14.
- Braille books and magazines (some have tactile graphics) available on loan from [www.loc.gov/nls](http://www.loc.gov/nls).
- Combination of print/braille picture books that sighted individuals and braille readers can enjoy together.
- Various audiobook formats, such as cassette tapes, CDs, pre-loaded MP3 players (like the Playaways), downloadable audiobooks, and e-books.
- Audio described television programs and movies (DVS).

### **Resources**

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped  
Primary resource for locating bibliographies and fact sheets relating to vision and physical disabilities. Useful in identifying your local library for the blind and visually impaired. This site also facilitates the formation of partnerships and resource-sharing. Find informational reference circulars (including the Assistive Technology Circular, which provides purchasing information on the devices), braille materials, and magnifiers.

<http://www.loc.gov/nls>

<http://www.loc.gov/nls/reference/circulars/>

#### **RFB&D**

A non-profit organization for individuals with print disabilities. Provides technical and scholarly materials in special formats. A specific playback unit is required. Sign-up fee required.

[www.rfb&d.org](http://www.rfb&d.org)

#### **Bookshare**

This online resource provides downloadable books in various formats such as DAISY and Braille. Sign-up fee required.

[www.bookshare.org](http://www.bookshare.org)

#### **AFB Accessworld**

Magazine providing current information on assistive technology.

[www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)

### **Print/Braille Book Resources**

Seedlings Braille Books for Children

<http://www.seedlings.org>

National Braille Press

<http://www.nbp.org>

Universal Media Services

[universalmediaservices.org](http://universalmediaservices.org)

### **Audio Description Resources**

WGBH

<http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/mag/resources/dvs-home-video-catalogue.html>

Audio Vision Canada

Producers of audio-described videos and DVDs.

<http://www.audiovisioncanada.com>

