

Moving around safely: Everyday problems and their solutions

You may know someone who has problems with things like steps, road crossings, missing the bumps in the footpath when he or she is out walking so he or she trips and falls. Guide Dogs NSW/ACT aims to enhance the safety and confidence of people with vision impairment so that when they are out walking, they can be as independent as they wish.

Whilst most people with sight difficulties have some useful, functional vision, many use a mobility aid such as a white cane. Described below are the three main types of canes used in Australia.

Long Cane

- Generally used by people with poor or no sight to gather information about what is happening ahead and at ground level.
- Clears a path about one pace in front of a person and tells him or her about obstacles, hazards, ground level changes, single steps and flights of stairs
- A long cane helps identify the user as having a vision impairment. This identification is useful in various situations including road crossings, bus stops, crowded areas and obtaining assistance in shops.
- There are a variety of different tips that are used on the end of the long cane. Long canes now also come in a variety of colours.



Identification Cane

- Used by people with low vision.
- It can be used to help to check the step or stair height and confirm ground level changes.
- A white identification cane helps identify the user as having a vision impairment. This identification is useful in various situations including road crossings, bus stops, crowded areas and obtaining assistance in shops.



Support Cane

- Used by people with low vision who also prefer support.
- It helps the person to confirm the step or stair height.
- A white support cane should help identify the user as having a vision impairment. This identification is useful in various situations including road crossings, bus stops, crowded areas and obtaining assistance in shops.



Helping a person using a cane

Most people who travel using a cane travel independently and may not need help from the public. Orientation and Mobility training enables the person to know about where he or she is travelling and how to do so safely using a mobility aid. The best way you can assist somebody in this instance is to move out of his or her way.

There are however some situations when a person may require assistance. The best way to help someone with vision impairment is to follow these tips:

On the Footpath

- Always **ask** the person if he or she needs help, by asking “Do you need help?”
- If he or she *does* need help, ask them “**How** may I help you?”
- Always address the person **directly**, never through a third person.
- If he or she needs to be guided let him or her take **your** arm (just above the elbow) and you need to travel slightly in front of him or her.
- If he or she needs instructions, be clear and **precise**. Remember to give direction from where the person is standing, not from where you are standing.
- Use language as you usually would, include words such as “look” and “see” without feeling uncomfortable.

When you are driving

- Please **do not** use hand gestures to ‘wave on’ the person with vision impairment whilst he or she is attempting to cross a road.
- Please **do not** flash your lights or beep your horn. This may only confuse the person trying to cross the road.

Guide Dogs Australia provides all of its services, including mobility aids, free of charge.

To refer someone to us, with their permission, please phone your nearest Guide Dogs office on: 1800 804 805

www.guidedogsaustralia.com