



Massachusetts Association for the
Blind and Visually Impaired

ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY

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TRAINING OVERVIEW

Massachusetts Association for
the Blind and Visually Impaired

Introduction

White Canes and Guide Dogs

How to Guide a Person who is Blind or has Low Vision

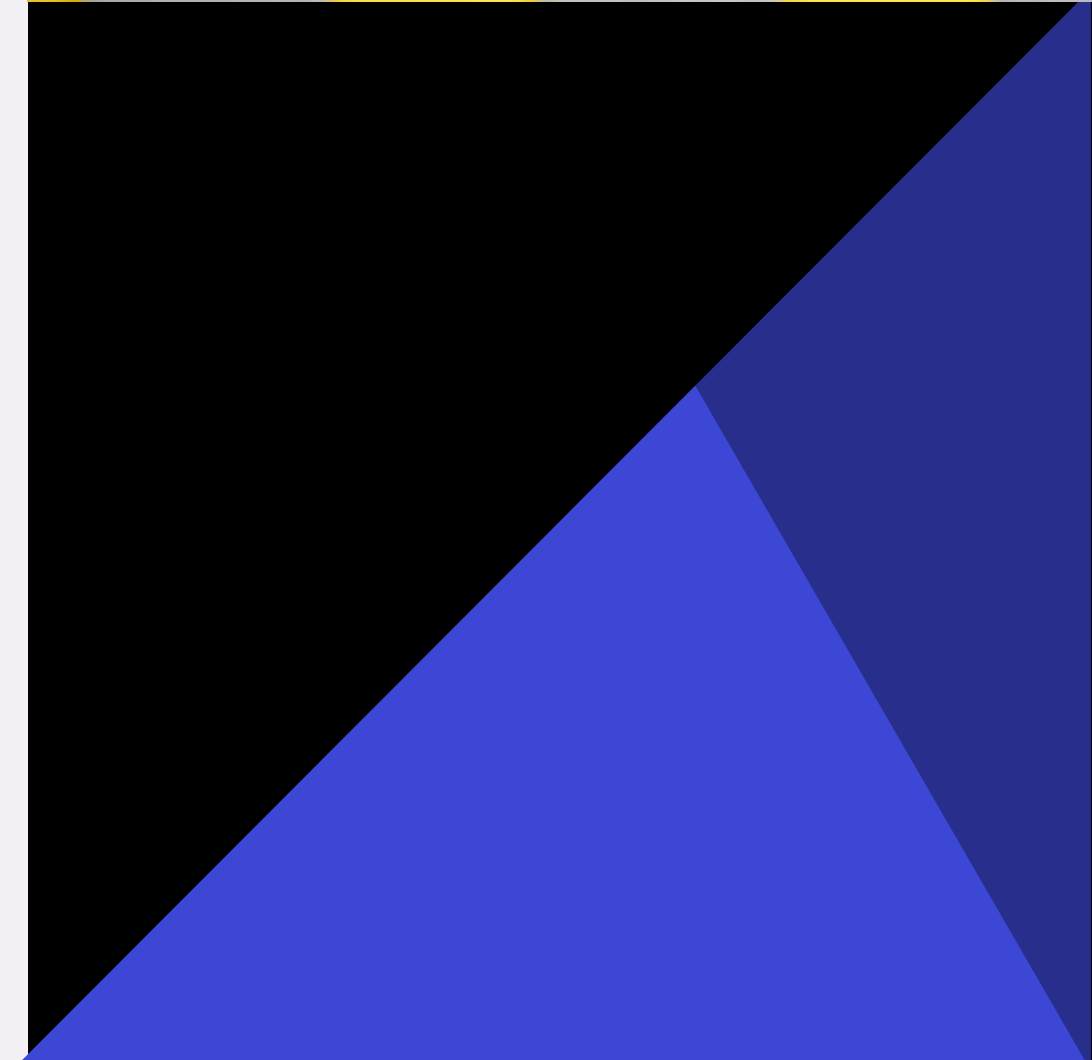
WHITE CANES AND GUIDE DOGS

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WHITE CANES

White canes are used primarily to help navigate the area ahead of the user. A white cane allows a person to check for objects in the path of travel, changes in the surface underfoot, and the nature of the surface ahead. There are different styles and lengths of white canes, depending on a person's height, vision loss and specific needs:

- [Long white canes](#) can be collapsible or rigid. Training to use mobility tools such as a white cane or guide dog requires an Orientation and Mobility Instructor.
- [Support canes](#) can be collapsible or rigid, and is designed to support a person's weight to help the person walk with more ease.
- [ID canes](#) are used primarily to let the public know that a person is blind or has low vision.



GUIDE DOGS

Only a small percentage of people who are blind or have low vision use a guide dog. This is because there are not enough guide dogs to go around, and also because once people have mobility training with a white cane, they decide that they are fine without a dog. The most important qualifications for a great guide dog for the blind are intelligence, memory, impeccable behavior in public, initiative, good health, high stress tolerance, and confident demeanor.

Important Etiquette: When a guide dog is in harness, that means it is working. You should **never** pet a guide dog while it is working!



How does one get a guide dog?

There is a long wait list to be matched with a guide dog. Guide dog schools match based on the person's mobility, personality, lifestyle and physical needs. Once matched, a person and their guide dog must attend a 2-4 week training program which allows for a blend of customized training formats to meet a person's goals and objectives. Guide dogs learn to take directional cues from the handler and are taught to intelligently disobey if there is an unsafe situation in the handler's path.

There are advantages and disadvantages to both guide dogs and canes. For instance, a guide dog is a living animal with needs, while a cane can be folded up and put in your pocket. However, guide dogs can protect you from obstacles above the waist, while a white cane cannot.

TO CHOOSE A GUIDE DOG OR A WHITE CANE?

There is no right or wrong answer. Each person who is blind or has low vision can choose the right mobility tool for their needs and lifestyle with their Orientation and Mobility Instructor.

HOW TO GUIDE SOMEONE WHO IS BLIND OR HAS LOW VISION

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ALWAYS START BY INTRODUCING YOURSELF. THEN, ASK THE PERSON IF THEY WOULD LIKE A GUIDE. NEVER GRAB OR PULL A PERSON WHO IS BLIND OR HAS LOW VISION.

TO BEGIN THE GUIDING PROCESS

Once the person confirms they are in need of a sighted guide, touch the back of your hand to the back of the person you will be guiding's hand. The person you are guiding will trace up your arm and grasp just above the elbow. Once this has been done, keep your arm relaxed at your side.





GUIDING TECHNIQUE

Stay a half step ahead of the person you are guiding while walking together at a normal pace.

Approach stairs (or curbs) squarely and never at an angle. Briefly pause to announce whether the steps go up or down and what side the railing is located. The person you are guiding will follow one step behind you, holding the handrail with one hand and your arm with the other. Acknowledge when the person you are guiding has reached the top or bottom of the stairs. (Some people will navigate stairs on their own with the help of a mobility tool.)

There is no need to count stairs. Although, it is helpful to mention if there is a landing or if the stairs curve left or right at any point.



STAIRS

DOORS



When approaching a door, pause to say whether the door opens toward or away from you, and whether it opens to the left or the right. This allows the person being guided to move to the appropriate side. Open the door and proceed.

Announce that you have placed your hand on the back of the chair and which way it is facing. Allow the person you are guiding to trace your arm downwards towards the back of the chair. They can proceed to sit down from there.



CHAIRS

ANCHORING



Never leave the person you are guiding in a “free space”. If you two have to separate momentarily, place the hand of the person you are guiding on a nearby wall or pole so they are not standing in the way of others.

Announce that you have placed your hand on the door handle. Allow the person you are guiding to trace your arm downwards towards the door handle. Have the person you are guiding locate the edge of the car roof with their other hand, which allows the guided person to seat themselves.



GETTING INTO A CAR

MAINTAIN GOOD COMMUNICATION



Use descriptive language, especially when in unfamiliar surroundings or encounter any potential obstacles. This is very helpful when walking on gravel or grass, as a person who is blind or has low vision will not be able to sweep their cane as freely as they would on a flat surface.