



TIPS TO USE WHEN Working With Newcomers Who are Blind or Partially Sighted

This tip sheet was created using resources and information from CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind) and Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada.

- **Introduce yourself each time you meet with someone who is blind or partially sighted.** Don't make the person guess the sound of your voice. This remains true even if you have met with them previously. Many spaces are full of competing sounds; people talking, music, traffic, etc. Introducing yourself ensures that the person you're meeting with knows who you are. It is equally important to verbally state when you are leaving a room, so that someone is not left speaking to you when you're no longer present.
- **Ask the person who is blind or partially sighted if they want your assistance before physically guiding them through a space.** You should never assume that a person who is blind or partially sighted needs a guide or touch them without being asked. You can offer to act as a sighted guide, but should respect the person's wishes if they decline your offer. For more information on acting as a sighted guide, visit the CNIB site here: [Step-by-Step \(cnib.ca\)](https://www.cnib.ca/step-by-step).
- **Don't leave furniture or potted plants near doorways or in hallways, and do not put picture frames on walls at hand height.** Many Blind people will follow along the length of a doorway or wall to navigate through a space. Removing obstacles, like furniture and picture frames, makes this process easier for them and reduces the potential for injury.



Image Credit: CNIB

- **How to identify a guide dog.** There are several breeds around the world that are trained as guide dogs, but most in Canada are labrador retrievers, golden retrievers, goldendoodles, standard poodles, or German shepherds¹. Guide or seeing-eye dogs typically wear a chest harness with a handle bearing the logo of the school where they were trained. Please see the photo below for an example.
- **When you see a guide dog in public, ignore the dog.** If a guide dog is out in public, that means the dog is working and needs to have its full attention focused on assisting its owner. It is not appropriate to pet or call out to a guide dog without the owner's permission.
- **Before meeting with a person who is blind or partially sighted, clarify their preferred format for receiving information.** People who are blind or partially sighted use different tools to help them access written information, including Braille, screen-reader technology, and large print text. While it is mainly older generations that use Braille, it is still taught in schools today so students can access information in multiple ways. Please see below for further tips on increasing the accessibility of your materials.
 - **Ensure documents and other meeting materials are accessible to those who are partially sighted.** To view a copy of CNIB's Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines, visit their site here: [Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines \(cnib.ca\)](https://www.cnib.ca/clear-print-accessibility-guidelines).
 - **Educate your staff and volunteers on screen-reader technology.** Many blind or partially sighted people rely on screen-reader software to access written materials. To learn about some examples of this software, visit the CNIB site here: [Screen Readers | CNIB](https://www.cnib.ca/screen-readers)

- **It is important to ensure that your materials are screen-reader compatible.** If documents are formatted with text inside complex graphics in a way that doesn't work well with that technology, this creates a challenge for the user. See Appendix 1 for some basic tips.
- **When sharing a meal with someone who is blind or partially sighted, describe how the food is arranged on the plate.** For instance, you can use the face of a clock as a reference – “Your salad is at four o'clock and your steak is at ten o'clock”².
- **Inform newcomers of the services available to people who are blind or partially sighted in Canada.** Newcomers may arrive in Canada from countries that have different perceptions of blindness, vision loss and disability. Newcomers may not know that Canada offers a range of supports and services for those who are blind or partially sighted, including many paid for by the government, non-profits and charities. These services include connecting the newcomer with devices, software and other assistive technology to support them in their daily lives.
- **Some organizations, like Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, will accept client referrals directly from service provider organizations (SPOs) for services and programs.** From there, the organization can work with the client to contact their family doctor and/or optometrist to get the medical information required to best support them.
- **Some organizations that provide services and supports for people with vision loss have partnerships with local SPOs that give them access to language interpreters.** If you are worried about how a community organization will communicate with an ESL- or EAL-learner client, ask if they already have access to interpretation services.

² Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), ⁴ Common Courtesies to Offer People Who Are Blind: [Be Natural! 4 Common Courtesies to Offer People Who Are Blind | CNIB](#)

- **Only one third of Canadian working age adults with sight loss are employed, with half struggling to make ends meet at \$20,000 a year or less**³. Many organizations that offer services for those with vision loss have career and employment support programs. Programs assist clients with tasks like resume-building, navigating the disclosure of one's sight loss to an employer or potential employer, and finding the technology and resources that provide the best accommodations for them as individuals. Examples of such programs are Come to Work at CNIB⁴ and Career and Employment Services⁵ at Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada. When connecting with a community organization that supports those who are blind or partially sighted, make sure to ask about employment initiatives. Some organizations even offer tools and assessments that help workplaces to determine whether they are ready to onboard an employee who is blind or partially sighted.
- **For more information on recruiting and interviewing someone who is blind or partially sighted for a job, visit the CNIB site here: [Hiring Someone with Sight Loss | CNIB](#)**
- **If you don't know what to do, Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada recommends introducing yourself and then asking a person with vision loss "Is there anything I can do to help you?"** Framing an offer of help in this way centers the needs of the person with vision loss while also giving them the option to preserve their independence by declining your offer.
- **The Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) offers a Sight Loss Integration Teacher Toolkit for working with English language learners who are blind or partially sighted. To access the toolkit, please visit the ISANS website here: [Integrated Sight Loss Teacher Toolkit - Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia \(isans.ca\)](#)**

APPENDIX 1

Tips for increasing the screen-reader compatibility of your materials

1. Avoid hand-written text and thin typefaces⁶.
2. To keep your text legible, use sans serif fonts for body text⁷.
3. Refer to the official Web Content Accessibility Guidelines when creating digital content: [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.2 \(w3.org\)](#)

³ CNIB, Career Support and Employment Program: [CNIB's Career Support and Employment Program](#)

⁴ For more information, visit the CNIB site here: [Come to Work | CNIB - Come to Work](#)

⁵ For more information, visit the Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada site here: [Specialized Services | Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada](#)

⁶ Access Smithsonian, Inclusive Digital Interactives: Best Practices and Research: [Inclusive Digital Interactives Best Practices + Research](#)

⁷ Ibid.