

INCLUDING EVERYBODY, EVERY DAY

Perkins SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND





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About seven million people who are blind or visually impaired live in the United States.

However, in a recent study commissioned by Perkins School for the Blind, 55 percent of respondents said they have not interacted with a person who is blind in the past year.

How can that be? How can seven million people go unnoticed?

Because they so rarely interact with someone who is blind, members of the sighted population remain unsure of how to engage with someone with a visual impairment. And so they don't. That reaction has powerful negative consequences, causing people who are blind to feel stuck at the edges of society due to the stigma around blindness and the feelings of discomfort, fear and pity that it elicits from people with sight.

The good news is that barriers to inclusion can be overcome by equipping the sighted population with information on how to interact with a child or adult who is blind. While the purpose of this e-book is to provide tips for social interaction with people who are blind, the most important thing to remember is that these individuals are people first and should be treated with the same respect as their sighted peers.



55%

stated they either haven't seen a blind person in the last year or can't even remember the last time they saw a blind person

Who We Are

Perkins School for the Blind is a progressive, multi-faceted organization committed to improving the lives of people with blindness and deafblindness all around the world. The Perkins mission is to prepare children and young adults who are blind with the education, confidence and skills they need to realize their full potential.



Perkins carries out its mission through five primary areas of focus:

- 1 Perkins School for the Blind** – Offering a continuum of specialized education programs including day and residential programs on our campus and direct and consultative services in public schools.
- 2 Perkins International** – Supporting the development of high-quality, sustainable education programs for children and young adults with visual impairment around the world.
- 3 Perkins Solutions** – Providing innovative assistive technology products and consulting services to people, organizations and governments around the world.
- 4 Perkins eLearning** – Offering professional development and online resources to support anyone, anywhere, in the field of blindness education.
- 5 Perkins Library** – Circulating more than 540,000 items in braille, audio, electronic and large print formats to thousands of patrons in the U.S.

Nice to See You

Interacting with someone who is blind isn't rocket science, but there are certain things you can do and say that are likely to be appreciated. In general, try to be aware of the visual information around you – a flyer promoting an upcoming community event, a PowerPoint slide at a staff meeting, a new guest walking through the door at a cocktail party – and communicate that information to the person who is blind.

When it comes to blindness people need to realize that yes, it's hard. Any type of impairment you have is hard. But with the right attitude and the right effort, you can be totally independent and totally content with life. It's challenging being blind, but it is a lot less challenging than a lot of other things. It's not only doable, it's doable with happiness.

– Kate Katulak

Teacher, Perkins School for the Blind



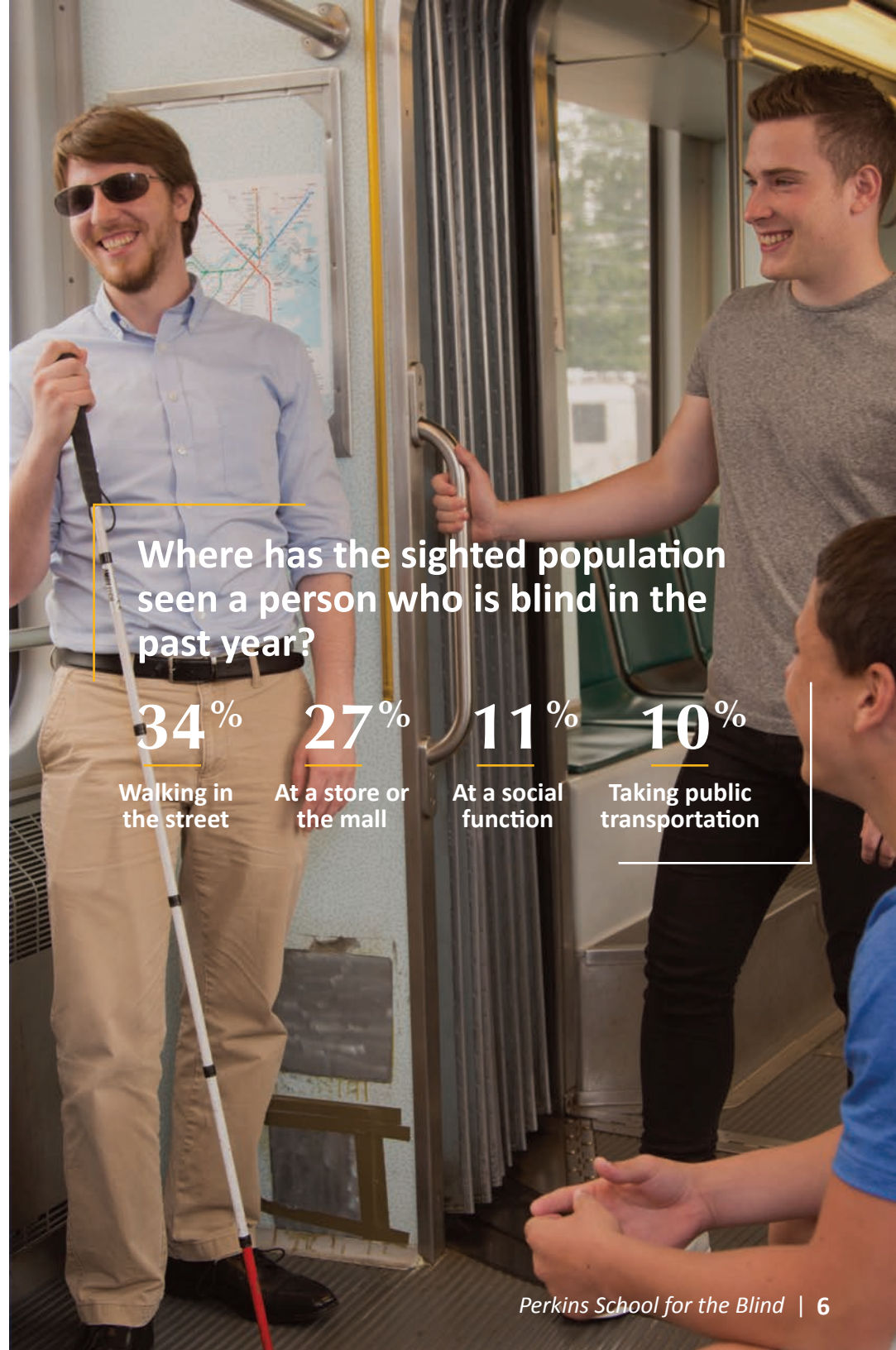
In Your Neighborhood

When was the last time you saw someone who is blind in public? What did you do? Did you avoid them out of fear they might bump into you and you wouldn't know what to say? While that might be a common feeling, know that people who are blind just want to be treated like everybody else. Relax, act naturally and consider these tips the next time you interact with someone who is blind.

1. SAY HELLO. When you see a person who is blind in public, greet them the same way you would greet a sighted person. Say hello and ask how they're doing.

2. USE "PERSON-FIRST" LANGUAGE. People who are visually impaired don't let their blindness define them, and neither should you. By calling someone a "person who is blind" instead of a "blind person," you're emphasizing the person and not their disability.

3. IDENTIFY YOURSELF when approaching someone who is blind or when entering a room that person is occupying. Even if the person has met you before, they may not be able to recognize you solely by your voice. In a group setting, address the person by name so they know you're talking to them, and let them know when you exit.



Where has the sighted population seen a person who is blind in the past year?

34%

Walking in the street

27%

At a store or the mall

11%

At a social function

10%

Taking public transportation



4. DON'T CENSOR YOURSELF. It is perfectly acceptable to say things like “I saw that,” or “Nice to see you,” to a person who is blind.

5. EXTEND AN INVITATION. If you know someone who is blind, invite them to community activities. If you see a flyer for a block party or clean-up in your neighborhood, alert people who are blind who live nearby.

6. DON'T PET OR DISTRACT A WORKING GUIDE DOG. Guide dogs have one task: to work with their owners to reach their destinations safely. Distracting them makes them less effective and can put their owner in danger.

7. IF YOU THINK SOMEONE WHO IS BLIND MIGHT NEED HELP with navigation or directions, ask first. Chances are he's just fine, but he won't be offended by your interest in his well-being. Give him a chance to say “Yes, please,” or “No, thank you.”

8. IF YOUR HELP IS ACCEPTED, allow the person to take your arm just above the elbow. By holding your arm at this position, someone who is blind is able to feel your movements and follow at a comfortable pace.

9. IF YOU SEE SOMEONE WHO IS BLIND ABOUT TO ENCOUNTER SOMETHING DANGEROUS (a work site or a large hole in the sidewalk), be calm and provide a clear warning. Yelling “Watch out!” to someone who is blind doesn't provide them with clarity on their surroundings. Using specific, directional language like, “There's a hole in the sidewalk in front of you,” gives someone who is blind the specific information they need to avoid potential danger.

10. WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS. Most people with a disability would prefer that you ask questions rather than make assumptions. Just remember to be respectful. For example, it's

OK to ask what it's like to be blind, but don't ask things that diminish the capabilities of a person who is blind (things like, “Where's your caretaker?”)

A lot of people have these really strange misconceptions about blindness. They think if you're blind, life might as well be over. I try to tell people that I'm normal in every other way; the only difference is that you can see and I can't, so I have to figure out other ways of doing things that you normally would use vision for.

**– Charles Goumas,
Perkins alumnus**

Working Together

People who are blind hold positions in a large variety of professional fields. Advances in assistive technology have made workplaces more accessible, allowing people with visual impairment to bring new perspectives and skills to the workplace. Understanding how to act as a coworker of someone who is blind will help create a more inclusive work atmosphere where teams can thrive.

For even more details, including how to hire people who are blind, see our e-book called [Working Together, Every Day](#). But at a minimum, consider these tips for interacting with people who are blind at work – including customers or clients who are unable to see:

1. IDENTIFY YOURSELF AND EVERYONE ELSE IN MEETINGS. When holding a meeting, go around the table and have everyone state their name. This lets an employee who is blind know exactly who is in the room and participate fully in the meeting.

2. DESCRIBE THE LAYOUT OF THE OFFICE AND CONFERENCE ROOM. Navigating an office can be tricky. Narrow walkways, cubicles and sharp turns could make walking around difficult for an employee who is blind and unfamiliar with the surroundings. Describing





the layout allows an employee to better understand the building and navigate with more confidence.

3. PROVIDE ELECTRONIC COPIES AHEAD

OF TIME. You'll be handing out in hard-copy form or presenting via PowerPoint prior to a meeting. This gives staff members with disabilities the opportunity to load the documents onto their computer or assistive device, print them in an accessible format or listen to them in auditory format. Providing copies ahead of time is a simple courtesy. Just as you would never give a handout to all the tall people in the audience while telling anybody below 5' 10" that you'll send them a copy later, don't make people who are visually impaired be the last in line to receive essential information.

4. DON'T USE HIGHLY STYLIZED

TYPEFACES. When preparing documents, avoid using stylized or graphical fonts, as these can be difficult for individuals with low

vision to read. Instead, use easy-to-read, sans-serif fonts such as Helvetica, Verdana or Arial.

5. ADD ALTERNATIVE TEXT TAGS

TO GRAPHICS. If you insert a graphic or photograph into your PowerPoint presentation, Word document or webpage, add alternative text tags that briefly describe the image. Depending on the software you're using, this can usually be done by right-clicking on the graphic and choosing "Properties."

6. ADD AUDIO DESCRIPTION TO VIDEOS.

Similar to adding text to graphics, adding audio description to videos helps an employee who is blind understand what is happening in the video when dialogue isn't descriptive enough.

7. ASK ABOUT ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY.

Gaining a better understanding of the assistive technology an employee who is blind uses will help you contribute to a more inclusive workplace. For example, when printing out

documents for a meeting, know what assistive technology your coworker who is blind uses. That way, you will remember to create accessible documents that can be converted to audio with a scanner, or read digitally by a screen reader (software that reads text on a computer screen out loud).

8. DON'T TOLERATE EXCLUSION. If you overhear colleagues making disparaging comments about any coworker, including those who are blind, speak up and let them know that their behavior is inappropriate. If it continues, inform your manager. Negative behaviors not only create exclusionary barriers, they inhibit productivity.

In today's high-tech workforce, it's becoming more and more common to work with people who are visually impaired. So following these simple do's and don'ts is not just good business etiquette – it's good business.

Out and About

Imagine you are at a dinner party and a guest brings a colleague who is blind. Or, maybe one of your daughter's classmates is coming to your house for a playdate and they happen to be blind. What do you do? When most people have company over, they make sure to clean up and put things away, but how do you prepare when someone who is blind comes to visit? Here are a few easy tips:

1. REMOVE OBSTACLES. People who are blind navigate new spaces all the time, whether they're walking down the street, going to the store or visiting a park. Your house is no different. However, be considerate and don't leave unnecessary obstacles lying around. Clearing the floors will help your guest to navigate through your house safely and with ease.

2. DESCRIBE YOUR HOME. When your guest arrives, let him know where things in your house are (the kitchen table, the couch, etc.) This will help him to feel more at home.

3. MAKE MEALS EASY. Describe what you are making and offer to put a plate together for your guest. Don't forget to describe the location of each item: "The chips are on the left side of your plate, and your drink is next to it on the right."

4. BE DESCRIPTIVE IN CONVERSATIONS. Try to be conscious of what you and your other guests are seeing. Be descriptive in what you are talking about so that everyone feels included and able to contribute.

I can horseback ride, ski, ice skate, play soccer, ride a bike, and swim. Being blind to me means that my eyes just don't work as well, but it doesn't stop me from being active!

– Madeleine Babcock, age 12
competitive swimmer, public school student



Conclusion

Engaging with people who are blind creates a more inclusive community and opens the door to opportunity for more than seven million Americans. For more tips on how to interact with someone who is blind, or to educate yourself on blindness issues, follow the Perkins blog at Perkins.org/stories/blog and check out the inspirational Blind New World campaign at blindnewworld.org.

