

**Visual Impairment Services
Highland**

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The Resource Centre
38 Ardconnel street
Inverness
IV2 3EX

Tel: 01463 233663

E-mail: highlandvision@hotmail.com



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It should be borne in mind that while a sighted person sees an area as a whole before noting detail and generally builds up awareness of the whole. Some blind people may like to be told what is in a room before exploring it, others may prefer to have objects identified as they explore the room. Hazards near the ground, such as a coffee table, should be pointed out as well as head height shelves. On the other hand, a blind person is likely to be confused if given too much information. They will not always be able to remember the way to the toilet the first time. Landmarks such as a radiator opposite the toilet door are useful for them to know about.

Getting Around

If newly blind people are to learn to move about safely, both they and the people they live with have to make some adjustments. It is vital to establish rather than diminish a blind person's self confidence, so the right balance has to be struck between helpfulness and over-protection. Though it is natural for close relatives or friends to do as much as possible newly blind people, it is generally kinder to encourage them to do as much as they can for themselves. But blind people must be shown how to protect themselves from injury. A few common sense precautions in the home can prevent the kind of accidents which not only results in cuts and bruises, but also discourage the more timid from attempting again to move about independently.

Helping a blind person to move about independently

It is neither desirable or practical for a blind person to always rely on a sighted person's help to move about indoors. Most blind people know the way around their own homes and can easily remember the layout of furniture in any of the rooms. Some newly blind people instinctively learn to get information from their other senses. The ticking of a clock, for example, or the sound of a radio can help them to find their way around. There is a device called a sound beacon to serve the same purpose. It gives off noises varying from a loud whistle to low intermittent bleeps. It signals continually when switched on, so it can also be used to mark the position of objects in a large room or out in the garden.

Textures underfoot can also give valuable clues. Providing it is fixed, a strip of carpet that leads from a favourite chair to the door of the sitting room may help.

A large door mat which covers the hallway for a couple of feet gives a blind person approaching from the inside advance warning of the door's location. A tactile indicator such as an attractive tile on the toilet door will distinguish it from the bathroom, or could be used to ensure that granny always opens her own door and not that of her teenage grandson. And if a blind grandparent shares a landing with teenagers, the stair gate which would protect her/him from falling down the stairs might cause a resentment for young people – who may also forget to shut it, but a bead curtain hung at the head of the stairs gives effective warning and is aesthetically pleasing to all. In an unfamiliar area, the blind person will need to be shown where the main features are, for example, the position of the sofa in relation to the door, or the cooker in relation to the table, so that they can work out the best way of getting from one to the other.