







What does it feel like to be blind?

Appendix 5: *Blind people won't bite you! Facts in a nutshell*



1. The most important principle thanks to which interaction with blind people will be good, even though you may not know what to do: behave naturally, be yourself, and if you don't know something or want to help, ASK. You have no contact with strangers. Do not treat a blind person with kid gloves or like a child with special needs, do not be excessively cautious. A blind person is still self-sufficient and does not need constant care.
2. When you'd like to greet a blind person by shaking hands, say so; it is enough to say: „I'm putting my hand out”, „give me your hand”, etc. The blind person can't see it. A short message will be enough for them to extend their hand towards you. Don't grab a blind person's hand and pull it until they shake it with you! Also, know that a blind person doesn't need to feel all over your body to shake your hand.
3. Always say 'yes' or 'no'; do not nod or shake your head instead. Of course, you can ALSO nod or shake your head, but only in addition to words, because a blind person won't see it.
4. Don't pull or tug at a blind person, don't be insistent – you can't grab a blind person by the arm at a pedestrian crossing and yank them 'because one must help others'. Would you like someone to suddenly grab you and yank you? Ask politely if you can help. Many will take that opportunity, while others will refuse. Blind people do not need help at every step, most of them are resourceful and happy to be able to do something on their own. If you don't know how to help, again – ask. When a blind person agrees to let you help them, let them take your hand or your arm. Sometimes it's enough for them to put their hand on your shoulder, or for you to walk next to them. Not everyone likes being close to a stranger.



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5. Don't shout: „Watch out!” or „Not there, wrong side!”, „Not this way!”, „Watch out, there's a car!”, etc. – because you are just distracting them. A blind person can't watch out for anything when you shout that. „Not there” – meaning where? Sounds like the blind person should stop or turn back because they are about to run into something, but you aren't saying what. „There” explains nothing. Under no circumstances should you push a blind person to the other side of the pavement because they could become disoriented, and they usually know where they are going. As for the situation with the car – when you shout, the blind person does not know whether the car is parked on the sidewalk, or whether it is turning right at them or driving towards them. You're confusing them again. The message: if you want to „rescue” a blind person, explain what is happening, it's enough to say e.g., there's a car parked on the pavement, and they have to walk around it.
 6. When you're part of a group and are speaking to a blind person, turn to them so that they know you are talking to them. Use their name to attract their attention. Don't look back, don't put your head down, don't stare at the floor. This just distracts attention, not just yours.
 7. Talk to the blind person, not next to them or to their companion, as though they were an interpreter.
 8. Tell them that you are about to walk away – if you're out and about with a blind or visually impaired person and want to walk away for a moment, tell them about it. Don't just walk away with no information, especially when you're talking. Firstly, nobody enjoys speaking to a wall, and secondly – a blind person won't notice you are now a metre away and gazing at shop windows. Moreover, in a noisy environment, it is more difficult to hear your footsteps when you are walking away. This is confusing.
 9. Do not avoid expressions like 'I've looked', 'I see', 'I've watched', etc. The blind live in a society and understand that you can see. They can hear things like that every day. Don't worry this will hurt their feelings. Blind people don't live on another planet – we have conversations too. I don't know anybody who would consider it inappropriate and take offence.
 10. Tell them about obstacles in their way: when you are taking a blind person to a place they don't know, help them get their bearings. While walking down the street, you can say: “Watch out, the curb is high, we'll get to the crossing soon, we'll now turn left, there's a bollard, there's a townhouse in front of us, there are some steps”, etc. Nobody is demanding that you give a vivid description of nature – just mention what matters. Imagine you are closing your eyes and walking an unfamiliar path. Yes, you're not the only one who'd be afraid. In this way, you can help bring the stress down.

11. Describe the room – when you go somewhere with a blind person, e.g., to your favourite restaurant, briefly tell them what is where: „On the left, close to you, we have tables, further on a large window, it is open. There is a bar to the right, there are six other tables ahead of us”, etc. This will make it easier for the blind to move around independently. To help find the chair, lightly place the blind person’s hand on the backrest. That will do. Don’t pull them or sit them down by force!


12. When you are in the home of a blind person, make sure you put everything back in its place. They usually have things arranged in such a way as to remember where everything is. For their convenience. If something is not where it should be, it will be difficult for them to find it. That’s why order matters. Also, do not leave doors and windows half open! Either close it completely or open it wide. Nobody likes a sudden collision with the handle of a door that’s ajar. The same applies to open gates (close them if they reach the pavement), rubbish bins put out all the way out on the pavement (they will take the garbage anyway if you put the bin closer to the fence), various strange objects placed in the middle of the road.

13. **IMPORTANT!** Blind people use computers! And even the Internet. This is how they work, study, and spend their free time. They can set up a Facebook account, write blogs, meet people, post in forums, etc. The effects of their work are no different from the effects of the work of sighted people. A blind person uses widely available keyboard shortcuts as well as those assigned to the reading program; they do not hover the pointer over a given element, but jump from one to another. There is a difference here, but it’s small. Screen readers and speech synthesizers are essential. A fairly good solution is NVDA – a free screen reader sufficient for home use with a built-in eSpeak speech synthesizer, but the synthesizer is a bit of a nightmare, as it does not resemble human speech. Instead, you can use the IVONA synthesizer that offers pleasant voices resembling human speech; one of the most interesting voices are Maja and Agnieszka. IVONA can also be used as a voiceover for a film, or when creating voice recordings or audiobooks, so it helps not only the blind. Windows 8 and later systems have a built-in Paulina synthesizer, which sounds like a human voice. Vocalizer is also a popular option, but it is not free.

Android has TalkBack with a synthesizer by Google, and iOS has VoiceOver, so phones are also accessible. The reader and the synthesizer must work together to read what we touch with our finger on the screen. The former turns the text into sound, the latter says it out loud. Headphones can be used for privacy.

TalkBack and VO are preloaded, so here’s how you can check how it works: first you need to go to the program’s settings and uncheck screen dimming. It is also good to check suspending the program with a physical button on the phone, because the gestures change.





In this way, you can, for example, suspend TalkBack and easily turn it off in the settings using your eyesight. This is often a problem for sighted people.

Text can be read out loud, graphics cannot.

Computers, telephones (also with a touch screen), tablets and even smartphones can be used by the blind. For instance, Apple has been providing tablets and smartphones with speech function for a long time. Windows has done that from the start. We are out of the Middle Ages. And how would a young person NOT use a phone, a computer? No option to make a phone call, go online, take notes at uni? So, it's obvious that this problem had to be solved.

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14. Don't take offence if a blind person does not want your help! Perhaps they don't need it, or they want to do something independently. Let them do it. A blind person is often more independent than many able-bodied adults. They will ask for help if they need to.

15. It isn't true that blind people's senses are sharper. A blind person will sense a scratch on the glass you will not notice, will recognise markings by the entryway, hear a rustle, remember the scent of your perfume. When one loses their eyesight, other senses replace it but are not sharpened. You don't hear better, but you hear more attentively. In this way, a person can get by. A blind person can also recognise banknotes (each banknote has distinct markings) – don't force your help on them, they can manage on their own.

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16. Blind people often live on their own, do laundry, cook, work, study, have children, partners, plans – they do just what you do, only using other senses. While you mainly use your eyesight, a blind person uses all their senses and their intuition. Each person will learn to function normally in the dark if they lose their sight because eventually they will be forced to get out of bed and leave the house. This is nothing unusual.

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17. Use the clock system during your meal. It is very simple. Imagine a clock face. Twelve o'clock: in front of me. Six o'clock: that's me. Three o'clock: my right hand. Nine o'clock: my left hand. When setting the food on the table, say what hours you are sitting on and what lies at what time. You can also describe the table using directions.

18. The Braille alphabet. It's an alphabet, not a language! No, those are not dots! It's the Braille script for the blind. Still very useful, even though in the age of electronics, the ability to read is disappearing and many people prefer audiobooks and e-books. I still have an old Erika Picht typewriter.

19. Do not pet a service dog working in a harness! The dog is at work and must not be distracted – it has the job of somebody's eyes. The dog has plenty of time for stroking and fun when not at work.

20. Get out of the way of a blind person. They won't do it because they can't see you.



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21. When you need a blind person's signature, guide their hand to where they should sign.
22. When you see that a blind person is coming too close to the tracks, the curb, or the metro (because the markings that make it easier to stop at a safe distance are not everywhere, and there are also careless people), stop them! Their health and even their life are at stake. Once, a young blind boy walked too close to the edge of a metro platform and fell, though he miraculously survived. His leg was amputated. In the noise, it is harder to distinguish sounds, because they overlap. Also, many traffic lights don't make any sound, so when asked about the color of the lights, don't be afraid to answer.
23. If you're in a shop and are asked to read out a label on the packaging, do so. If you are asked about the price, say the price. Do not be impolite if a blind person asks you to weigh something. Where there are customer scales in supermarkets, they are not accessible for the blind.
24. When asked about the way, explain where to go and where to turn. Don't be descriptive (e.g., 'behind the red counter'). Rather, say it simply (there is a counter, the drinks will be behind it). If you see that a blind person is hesitant, ask if they need something. Don't be afraid to approach them – they won't bite you!
25. Remember the most important things in this list – you never know who you might meet.

Source: <https://przychodniapzn.pl>