

What does it feel like to be blind?

What if you were transported to the world of the blind for a short moment, and experience your surroundings with all your senses except for sight? In this workshop, the participants will take on the part of a blind person. They will perform various tasks which will help them realise the obstacles a visually impaired person copes with daily.



OBJECTIVES

The participant:

- gains an insight into the functioning of blind people,
- practices using their senses: hearing, touch, smell, and touch,
- gains experience in functioning in the world of VR and gets to know new apps,
- develops their empathy.



EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS

- a room with six workstations
- a VR headset with the app Notes on Blindness installed (go through the whole story before the workshop),
- black blindfolds or eye masks (for 6 participants),
- small jars or lidded containers with 8 various strong-smelling substances (herbs/spices or other substances, such as mint, lavender, basil, cinnamon, garlic, vinegar, coffee, perfume), numbered 1-8,
- opaque (non-transparent) lidded containers with 8 edible things to try (e.g., lemon, apple, pear, dark chocolate, salt, sugar, banana), numbered 1-8,
- 8 opaque (non-transparent) bags or boxes with various objects in them (e.g., fork, pen, key, sock, paperclips, buttons, pasta, pine cones), numbered 1-8,
- printouts of appendixes (a set per pair),
- two copies of the text The blind won't bite you or two tablets with online access to the text,
- a screen or a computer to play the video How to lead a blind person correctly,
- pens/pencils (12),
- sticky notes,
- a flipchart page with the drawing of the outline of the human body (with the head and heart clearly marked), a bag, and a bin.

AGE

13+

DURATION

90 minutes

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

12 people



APPLICATION

Notes on Blindness
<https://www.oculus.com>



Note: this script uses an app for the Oculus Quest 2 headset. If you have another headset, find a similar app that works with it.

WORKSHOP



Welcome and introduction

Greet the participants. Ask them to sit down in a circle, close their eyes, and going clockwise, say their name and briefly describe what they look like (e.g. their hair colour and length, whether they wear glasses, what clothes they are wearing and what colour the clothes are). Before everyone shuts their eyes, point to the person who will be the first to introduce themselves. Ask the other participants to imagine each speaker as they speak. After everyone has introduced themselves, ask the participants about their feelings. Was it easy to describe themselves? Was it easy to imagine other participants based on their descriptions and the sound of their voice? Thank them for their comments.



Tell the participants they would try to take on the role of blind and visually impaired people and experience the world in which they function. They will sharpen all their senses apart from their eyesight. Tell them that the inspiration for the workshop is the app Notes on Blindness created on the basis of the experience of theologian John Hull, who lost his eyesight and recorded his experience on cassettes.

MAIN PART

Divide the participants in pairs, either letting them do it on their own or drawing lots/doing a countdown to 6. Tell them they will perform tasks which will help them experience the position of a blind or visually impaired person. Explain that each pair will have 10 minutes to do their task, after which they will switch with another pair (there can be only one pair doing a specific task at a time), until all tasks have been completed. Tell them what the tasks will involve and hand out the appendixes.

Task 1: hearing

In task 1, the participants will use their sense of hearing. Ask both participants in the pair to put on the headset, start the app Notes on Blindness, and play the chapter *How does it feel to be blind?* Ask them to listen carefully to the sounds in it, because they will need that information to answer several questions from the worksheet.

Task 2: smell

In task 2, the participants will use the sense of smell. Put the 8 numbered jars with mystery smells on the table. Tell the participants that each of them will have to identify 4 smells while wearing a blindfold. Their partner will hand the open jars to them and will write down the answers on the worksheet. After 4 smells have been identified, the two participants will switch places. Warn them to speak quietly so their answers are not heard by other pairs.

Task 3: taste

In task 3, the participants will use the sense of taste. Put the 8 (opaque) numbered containers with mystery substances to be tasted on the table. Tell the participants that each of them will have to identify four flavours while wearing a blindfold. Their partner will hand them the mystery product to be tasted and will write down their answers on the worksheet. After 4 flavours have been identified, the two participants will switch places. Warn them to speak quietly so their answers are not heard by other pairs.

Task 4: touch

In task 4, the participants will use the sense of touch. Put the 8 (opaque) numbered bags with mystery objects on the table. Tell the participants that each of them will have to identify four objects while wearing a blindfold. Their partner will hand them the bag with the mystery object to be handled, help them put their hand in the bag, and write down their answers on the worksheet. After 4 objects have been identified, the two participants will switch places. Warn them to speak quietly so their answers are not heard by other pairs.

Task 5: Assistant to a blind person

In task 5, the participants will take on the part of an assistant to a blind person. Tell them that each person in the pair will have to walk a certain route as a blind person led by their assistant. Play them the video: *How to correctly lead a blind person*: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/l83cQW1kle0> (in Polish) or find another similar video in a language your participants will understand. During the short walk, the participant playing the part of a blind person is blindfolded; after the walk, they change places with their assistant.

Task 6: Dos and don'ts in interactions with a blind person

In task 6, the participants learn useful information about how to interact with a blind person. The task is to read the text *Blind people won't bite you* (Appendix 5). Hand out a printout of the text or a tablet with the text to each participant.

After all the tasks have been completed by all the pairs, ask the participants to sit in a circle. Ask them what answers they gave in tasks 1, 2, 3, and 4. Discuss these answers. How many answers are correct? How did they feel while giving the answers? Ask the participants how they felt when doing task 5. Were they able to trust the person who assisted them during their walk? What emotions and feelings did they experience? Were they surprised by anything they read in task 6? What do they remember the most? Allow the group to share their thoughts and discuss the issues.

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION


Thank the participants for their time. Hand out pens and sticky notes and ask them to take part in the 'head/heart/bag/bin' evaluation exercise.

Before the workshop, prepare a flipchart page: draw an outline of the human body, clearly marking the head and the heart; next to the body, draw a bag and a bin.



Ask the participants to use four sticky notes and to write down something they'd like to preserve in their heads and in their hearts, keep in a bag, or throw in the bin. Tell them the head stands for what they have learnt in the workshop, the heart stands for what they experienced, the bag for what they found useful, and they will take home with them, and the bin for what was not necessary.




Notes:

1. The workshop is suitable for young adults, adults, or senior citizens.
 2. If there are fewer participants, leave out one or more tasks.
 3. If the number of participants is not even, you can be the assistant who hands the bags/containers and writes down the answers; alternatively, a volunteer or a person responsible for the group – if applicable – can fulfil that role.
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Appendixes

1. Worksheet: hearing
 2. Worksheet: smell
 3. Worksheet: taste
 4. Worksheet: touch
 5. Text: *The blind won't bite you*
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