



ACCESSIBILITY AND DISABILITY WORKING GROUP

*The Accessibility and Disability working
group of Shambhala International
2012*

Welcoming & Working with Persons Who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Our Goal

When creating enlightened society, we design our centres and services so the practice and teachings of meditation are available to all persons no matter their age, abilities or situation.

This means accommodating those with disabilities now. Since all of us will get old and sick at some point in the future, we also do this for the rest who enjoy being able bodied now temporarily.

Your Partner

Consider the Shambhala International Accessibility and Disability working group as your partner in

- Identifying accessible meditation centres for rent or purchase
- Assessing existing meditation centres and helping implement changes to improve accessibility.

Extend A Welcome Mat

We suggest that you extend a welcome mat to the general public by publishing on your website:

1. Contact information for your health and wellness director letting the public know that needs for accommodation can be discussed confidentially with this person before or during their visit to the centre.
2. Ask if accommodation is needed on your class registration form.
3. Provide some large print chant books (18-24 fonts, verdana and arial being best).

Familiarize Yourself With And Anticipate The Needs Of Your Participants

- Invite a visually impaired participant to attend the centre with an orientation and mobility specialist.
- Ask the participant what kind of support you can provide.

Tact and Courtesy

When interacting with a visually impaired participant:

- Feel free to use words that refer to vision during the course of a conversation such as look, see, and watching TV. The words blind and visually impaired are also acceptable in communication.

Be precise and thorough when you describe people, places, or things to someone who is totally blind.

Don't avoid visually descriptive language. Making reference to colours, patterns, designs and shapes is perfectly acceptable.

When you speak about someone with this disability refer to a "person who is blind" rather than a blind person.

If the person is traveling with a guide dog, do not pet the dog, offer food, or distract it in any way while it is working. Dog guides are not pets but highly trained mobility tools.

If someone is about to encounter a dangerous situation, be calm and clear about warning the person.

Do not take care of tasks for the person he or she would normally do. First ask the person if they need help, then offer to assist.

If you are asked to complete a task for someone, always leave things in the same place you found them.

Do not move furniture or other articles in your friend's home or your own home without letting the person know

Communication

- When greeting a friend who is visually impaired, don't forget to identify yourself. For example, "Hi, Jane. It's Sophia."

- Speak directly to your friend, not through an intermediary.
- Speak distinctly, using a natural conversational tone and speed. Unless the person has a hearing impairment you do not need to raise your voice.
- Address your friend by name, so he will know you are talking to him rather than someone standing nearby.
- As soon as a visually impaired person enters a room, be sure to greet the person by name. This alerts her to your presence, avoids startling her, and eliminates uncomfortable silences.
- Be an active listener. Give the person opportunities to talk. Respond with questions and comments to keep the conversation going. The person cannot always see the look of interest on your face, so give verbal cues to let him know you are actively listening.
- Say when you are leaving and where you are going if it is appropriate, for example, going to the kitchen to get a drink of water.
- Indicate the end of the conversation to avoid the embarrassment of leaving the person speaking when no one is actually there.

Being A Sighted Guide

Sighted guide technique enables a person who is blind to use a person with sight as a guide. The technique follows a specific form and has specific applications.

Offer to guide a person who is visually impaired by asking if they would like assistance. Respect their answer.

If your help is accepted, offer the person your arm. To do so, tap the back of your hand against the person's hand. They will grasp your arm directly above the elbow. Never grab the person's arm or try to direct him or her by pushing or pulling.

Relax and walk at a comfortable normal pace. Stay one step ahead of the person you are guiding, except at the top and bottom of stairs and to cross streets. At these places, pause and stand alongside the person. Then resume travel, walking one step ahead. Always pause when you change directions, step up, or step down.

The standard form of this technique may need to be modified because of other disabilities or height differences. Ask the person you are guiding if any modifications are needed.

When you are acting as a guide, never leave the person in „free space“. When walking, always be sure that the person has a firm grasp on your arm. If you have to be separated briefly, be sure the person is in contact with a wall, railing, or some other stable object until you return.

To guide a person to a seat, place the hand of your guiding arm on the seat. The person you are guiding will find the seat by following your arm.

Giving Directions

People who are not visually impaired tend to use gestures as much as verbal cues. This isn't helpful to someone who is visually impaired.

Here are some basic points to remember when giving directions to one who is visually impaired:

- Always refer to a specific direction as it applies to the person you are talking to: What is on your right is on the left of the person facing you.
- Indicate the approximate distance.
- Give the approximate number of streets to be crossed to reach the destination. Even if your estimate is wrong, it will give the person a sense of when to stop and ask someone else for further directions.
- If possible, provide information about landmarks. Both sounds and scents can be landmarks such as the smell of popcorn or coffee.

Contact us

We have several websites:

- The A & D working group Shambhala network group <http://shambhalanetwork.org/groups/accessibility-and-disability/forum/>
- The Accessibility and disability network web: <http://www.shambhala.org/community/da.php>

The websites, besides containing discussion forums also have lots of useful downloadable documents (like this one)

You can email us at accessibility.in.shambhala@gmail.com

or write to:

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