

INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS TRAINING

Independent living (IL) skills training and life skills training may include instruction to develop skills in areas such as personal care, coping, financial management, social skills, and household management. This may also include education and training necessary for living in the community and participating in community activities. Training is usually done at the center, in the community, and/or in the consumer's home on a one-on-one basis.

The goal of IL skills training is to assist consumers in their goals to attain their IL style. IL is based on the philosophy that a person with a disability should be in control of the services that allow him/her to live independently. Sometimes consumers need assistance to learn and/or improve IL skills to achieve greater independence. IL skills to be covered in the iKan manual include: clothing, communication, cooking, emergency preparedness, financial, grooming, health care, home organization, housekeeping, mobility basics, recreation, socialization, shopping, and transportation. According to the American Federation for the Blind, they are five common areas in each IL skill group: increase lighting, eliminate hazards, create color contrasts, organize and label items, and reduction of glare. Assistive technology plays a role in each of the five areas. These five areas are mostly for individuals with low vision.

Increase Lighting

- Use stronger light bulbs or 3-way bulbs to provide non-glare lighting.
- Put lamps in places where the person does close work. For example, put a gooseneck lamp in the reading-writing area.
- Many companies make light bulbs which simulate natural day light which can be very helpful to someone with low vision.
- Install extra lights in the bedroom closet and other frequently used closets in other rooms.
- Put special lighting over all stairways – the places where accidents are most likely to occur.

- Make sure the lighting level is consistent throughout the house so shadows and dangerous bright spots are eliminated – install rheostats
- Be certain the consumer can easily reach light switches from doorways and from the bed
- Use a night light in the bedroom, hallway, and bathroom

Eliminate Hazards

- Mark thermostats with brightly colored fluorescent tape at the most used settings
- Use nonskid, non-glare wax to polish floors
- Close closet and cupboard doors and drawers completely when finished
- Pick up shoes, clothing, books, and other items that could be tripped over. In fact, put away an object when finished using it—for the sake of safety and so it can be easily found the next time
- Mop up spills as soon as they occur

Create Color Contrasts

- Put light colored objects against a dark background—a beige chair against a dark wood paneled wall, for example—and vice versa—a black switch plate on a white wall.
- Install doorknobs that contrast in color with the door for easy location.
- Avoid upholstery with patterns. Stripes, plaids, and checks can be visually confusing.

Organize and Label Items

- Keep items that are used together near each other—on the same shelf, in the same closet, or in the same box.
- Label each box using a broad-tipped black felt marker. Or write the contents on index cards and attach the cards to the boxes with rubber bands. Self-adhesive labels are also handy.

Reduce Glare

- Glare can be caused by sunlight or light from a lamp and can make it difficult for an individual with low vision to see. Glass or highly polished table top, waxed floors, or the TV screen are common items that produce glare.
- Sunlight can fill the room with light without producing glare.
- Mini blinds are one of the best window coverings because they can be altered during the course of the day to eliminate the glare.
- Avoid using wax on the floor; use a flat finish.
- To make the television easier to see, simply turn the screen away from the sun or a lamp so the light source is behind the screen.

As you utilize each section of the IL skills training portion of the manual, you will find suggestions that will accomplish each of the 5 areas. Our suggestions, tips, and hints are a collection of information gathered at the focus groups, information learned at Texas Tech University by Orientation and Mobility Specialist students, and researching various web based resources. This is by no means a conclusive list and the members of iKan urge you to be creative and think outside the box when assisting an individual who is blind or experiences low vision. Remember, one tip may work with one person but not everyone.

CLOTHING CARE



Never assume that a lack of vision equals a lack of pride in looks – you would be wrong!

Clothing care starts with shopping and ends with mending. The first step is to ask which areas the individual needs assistance and ideas.

- ✓ Shopping
- ✓ Fold & hang clothes
- ✓ Organize
- ✓ Laundry
- ✓ Ironing
- ✓ Mend

Ways to shop for clothing

- Handheld video magnifier prices range from \$600 to \$1200
 - It is important to consult a low vision doctor for a prescription before obtaining magnifying equipment
- Buy one or two colors of pants, jeans, or skirts that will match every shirt, jacket or sweater
- Shop with a friend or family member
- Call ahead for a personal shopper
- Shop on-line

Organizing clothes

- Choose the most functional way to organize the closet
 - by color
 - by type of garment (slacks, shirts, jackets)

- by purpose (work, play, church)
 - by season
 - by pattern
- Develop and write down an identification system using some sort of clothing labeling system. (EX: Right corner of label cut means blue) Places and ways to mark are:
- Cut tag on clothing
 - Number of safety pins
 - Type of buttons
 - Type of beads
- Ways to identify clothing differences
- Different types of hangers (wire for brown, wooden for blue)
 - Braille tags – prices starting at \$29.95 for 100 tags
 - Labels made on index cards, wide marker and hung on the hanger of the item
 - Cut slits horizontal or vertically in clothing labels
 - Sew a number of long thread pieces into clothing labels (2 threads = blue)
 - Safety pins positioned on clothing labels
 - Different shapes and sizes of buttons or beads sewn on clothing labels
 - Tactile marking liquid – safe for clothing prices range from \$3 to \$16
 - Audio labels – prices starting at \$150
 - Color tester – prices range from \$175 to \$600

Laundry

- Sorting clothes
- Separate clothes hampers and baskets to sort by color
 - Sock sorters- starting at \$4
 - Safety pin socks together
 - Natural light lamps – prices range from \$50 to \$200
- Mark stains with a small non-rusting safety pin to treat before laundering and check after laundering.
- Use a stain stick with overlapping strokes to pre-treat stains prior to washing.
- Identify and mark features most utilized on washer and dryer
- Puff paint
 - Velcro dots

- Laundry supplies
 - Buy 3 in 1 sheets (laundry detergent, softener and dryer sheet in one)
 - Use measuring cups with large numbers
 - Use color catchers sheets to prevent color bleeding

Ironing

- Many individuals report they buy only garments that do not need to be ironed. However, for those who choose to iron, here are some safety precautions:
 - Heat resistant iron rests
 - Keep the electric cord away from the work area.
 - Automatic shut-off irons
 - To increase contrast, choose a solid colored ironing board cover.
 - Use a funnel to pour water into the iron

Mend clothes or thread a needle

- Use a seamstress
- Threading a needle
 - Use a needle-threader
 - Self threading needles
 - Needles with large eyes
 - Have family or friends thread several needles and store them in a pin cushion
- To mend, use double thickness of thread
 - Makes mending easier
 - Makes stitches last longer



“I know by touch what I am wearing. But if someone gives me a new shirt for Christmas, I may never wear it because I don’t recognize it.”

- Anonymous

COMMUNICATION



Many people with low vision prefer large print. Large print is considered 18 point or larger.

Phones

Many people who are blind or have low vision use a phone with large buttons or a mobile phone that has voice commands. All phones are made with a raised dot on the number 5 to use for orientation when dialing. Other options:

- ✓ Talking/Large button phone prices range from \$30 to \$70
- ✓ TAP program can assist with accessible phones at no charge to the consumer if they qualify.
 - Individuals who have a hearing, vision, speech, cognitive or mobility disability or impairment, or a combination of these disabilities/impairments can apply and receive equipment if the following eligibility requirements are met:
 - Have residency in the state of Kansas
 - Have telephone service in the home/residence
 - Have a disability or impairment in which a specialized telephone would be more helpful
 - Have a household gross income of less than \$55,000 per year (\$3,000 may be added for each dependent claimed).
- ✓ Pre –setting phone numbers and using speed dial
- ✓ BING-411: Free audio service that gives you directions, traffic conditions, and weather reports — on any phone (800-246-4411)
- ✓ Talking caller identification purchased separately for approximately \$20 or comes with a telephone or cable service.

Phone numbers

- ✓ Program numbers into their phone to be voice activated
- ✓ Large print address book with dark lines
- ✓ Card file – names and numbers written in dark marker on recipe cards
- ✓ Tape recorder to note numbers to be transferred into preferred system

- ✓ CCTV prices range from \$1,000 to \$6,000

Keeping appointments

- ✓ Use family or personal care assistants to help track appointments
- ✓ Sticky notes with large writing
- ✓ Large print calendars – prices range from \$10 to \$20
- ✓ Ask for reminder phone calls from doctors, dentists, hair dressers, etc.
- ✓ Ask family or friends to give reminder phone calls
- ✓ Electronic equipment: iPads, iPhones, computer software, talking PDAs, cell phones
- ✓ Email calendars such as Outlook
- ✓ Video and handheld magnifiers prices range from \$600 to \$1200
 - It is important to consult a low vision doctor for a prescription before obtaining magnifying equipment
- ✓ Use a large print timer to remind of appointments
- ✓ Use yellow paper with black lines

Remotes & appliances

To enjoy television programs, listen to the radio or use any appliance in the house that may have buttons, switches or knobs many people rely on memory to know where the button is located . Other options available:

- ✓ Lock dots
- ✓ Braille dots
- ✓ Add color
- ✓ Large print remote
- ✓ Place Velcro buttons
- ✓ Puff paint to mark items – prices range from \$1 to \$2
- ✓ Bump dots – prices range from \$5 to \$12



“I hate when you tell someone you are blind or have low vision and they start yelling at you or talking louder. I said I was blind, not that I can’t hear!” Woman at Emporia Low Vision Support Group

COOKING



Describe what is on a plate using the hands of a clock. Your green beans are at 5 o'clock.

Cooking is not only a hobby for many people, but it is also necessary for us all to survive. While it is true that pre-packaged foods have come a long way and most people love a burger occasionally, nothing is better than a home-cooked meal. If individuals enjoyed cooking before they lost some of their sight, loss of vision doesn't have to change that. While vision may have been one sense used to cook, they have always used the other senses as well and will continue to do so as they learn to cook with vision loss. That being said, if individuals didn't like to cook before vision loss, losing their sight probably won't make them suddenly want to become a chef. Hopefully, these tips will help people be as independent in the kitchen as they want to be.

Lighting

- Matte or dull sheen finishes will eliminate glare
- In most cases, direct light on the working surface is more useful
- Use gooseneck lamps to position light directly on the work surface

Appliances

- Mark appliances such as stoves and microwaves with puff paint, Elmer's glue, or sticky dots
- Many manufacturers will provide Braille or large print dials or overlays for kitchen appliances. Ask the sales representative before purchasing

Cookbooks

- Use talking cookbooks from the National Library Service Talking Book program
- Large print cookbooks are available at many websites
- Recipes can be printed from a computer using a large font
- Recipes can be saved on cassette tapes or a digital recorder
- Recipes can be written by hand with a thick tipped pen

Measuring cups, spoons & bowls

- Different colored bowls allow for contrast to what is being mixed
- Using contrasting measuring cup and ingredient colors might allow an individual to see if the correct amount has been poured
- Label measuring cups with puff paint or a permanent marker
- Large print measuring cups are available at many websites starting under \$4
- Bend measuring spoons to a 90 degree angle then the liquid can be dipped from the container

Cut & slice

- Palm-Peelers and triangle peelers start at \$4.95
- Use a fork to hold an item while slicing in place and the prongs can be used as a guide
- Slicing guides prices range from \$7.95 to \$15.95
- Slice round items in half to get a flat surface for easier cutting
- A black or white cutting board provides contrast
- Bend fingers at the knuckle, place on top of item to be sliced and use as a guide for safe knife placement
- Perfect Brownie Cutter starts at \$19.95 and includes a pan that bakes brownies individually

Pouring

- When first learning to pour, use a tray or a cookie sheet to catch spills
- When pouring liquids, place a finger in the glass and pour until the liquid reaches the finger
- Level indicators beep when the liquid reaches the top of the glass – prices range from \$10.95 to \$19.95
- When pouring, place the rim of the jar or bottle against the cup or glass

Cooking

- Use dark or light colored pans to contrast what is being cooked
- Oven rack guards reduce risk of getting burned – prices start at \$18.00
- Meat springs back when touched with a spatula if it is done
- Push the item being cooked towards the edge of the pan, once the spatula is under the item return it to the center of the pan before flipping
- Use a second utensil to hold the item being cooked in place until the spatula is slipped under
- Water, when boiling, makes a hissing noise
- Frying food usually sizzles less when it is ready to be turned
- Long sleeve oven mitts reduce the fear of getting burned



“I don't like food that's too carefully arranged; it makes me think that the chef is spending too much time arranging and not enough time cooking. If I wanted a picture I'd buy a painting.” Andy Rooney

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS



Good meaning people can easily invade an individual's right to choose all in the name of safety.

Knowing what to do in an emergency is not only an individual's best protection but is also a personal responsibility.

Step one

- Determine what disasters may occur in the individual's area from local office of emergency management
 - Locate evacuation and storm shelters
 - Find out what warning signals the community uses
 - Obtain an Emergency Alert System radio
 - Know which television stations offer verbal emergency alerts
 - Find out if provisions are in place for individuals that are blind or have low vision
 - Regulations for guide dogs
 - Federal law allows for the individual to bring their guide dog or service animal to an evacuation shelter
 - Ask about the disaster plan for the workplace, church, community center, and other areas that are frequented

Step two

- Complete a personal assessment
 - What an individual is able to do before, during, and after a disaster
 - What assistance may be needed before, during, and after a disaster

Step three

- Develop emergency evacuation routes from the home
 - A minimum of two routes should be determined from each room of the home

- Practice evacuating by crawling on hands and knees to stay below the level of dangerous heat and smoke
- Include service animal in all evacuation drills
- Determine a “safe place” that the individual will evacuate to in case of fire or home emergency
- Purchase ABC type fire extinguishers and know how to use them
- Know where the emergency shut off valves and electrical breakers are
- Place extra canes in strategic places
- Have high powered flashlights and extra batteries available
- Develop a personal support network
 - Make an emergency information list that the personal support network can use
 - Develop a medical information list that contains at least the following information:
 - The names and numbers of doctors
 - All medications (prescription and over the counter), dosages and times of administration
 - Existing medical conditions
 - Note the adaptive equipment used, disability, and allergies

Step four

- Build a disaster kit and consider the following items
 - Seven day supply of medications
 - The medical information list
 - List of personal support persons
 - Service animal’s medical records
 - Three day supply of water for the individual and service animal
 - Pad of paper and pens or pencils for taking notes
 - Extra batteries for flashlight, tape recorder, portable TTYs, etc.
 - Extra pair of dark glasses, if used
 - Extra batteries for hearing aids
 - Food, medicine, and toy for service animal
 - Plastic bags, disposable gloves, and other items for animal’s care
 - Folding cane
 - Slate and stylus
 - Braille paper
 - Five days supply of non-perishable foods (check every 6 months and replace)
 - Manual can opener
 - Battery or crank operated radio

- Plastic emergency whistle
- First aid kit
- Blanket
- Toiletries and change of clothing
- Portable assistive devices
- Work gloves and sturdy shoes
- Photocopies of important documents
 - State or federal photo ID, passport, social security card, insurance card, Medicare and Medicaid cards, bank account numbers, and copies of local emergency numbers other than 911

Step five

- Kansas Vulnerable Needs Planning System registry
 - The information collected for the registry includes: Name, location, age, language, gender, type of home, contact number, emergency contact, special equipment needs, transportation needs, service animal needs, health issues including limitations, caregiver requirements, mobility needs, oxygen dependency, electricity importance for medical equipment, and allergies.
 - If an Individual chooses they can register by filling the Individual System Information at helpmekansas.org or by contacting United Way 2-1-1 by dialing 211 and providing the information over the phone.



“When you hear about a disaster on the news, think about how you would respond. One time there was an ammonia spill in Hutchinson and they were evacuating my neighborhood. Here I was a blind mom with two babies, no transportation, and my husband could not get in to help us. Dan talked his way in by promising to transport a neighbor to the shelter but it was scary.”

Chris Owens

FINANCIAL SKILLS



It is a good idea for people to verbalize the exchange of money. Tell the cashier what is being handed to them. Let them know you know.

Managing personal finances is an important part of independence for most people. These skills may take many forms including: writing checks, banking, bill paying and cash transactions.

Writing a check

- ✓ Large print checks with dark and/or raised lines
 - Large print check register- prices range from \$6 to \$10
- ✓ Check guides can be hand made from card stock
 - Writing guides for specific purposes- prices start at \$2
- ✓ Debit cards
- ✓ Hand Held Video Magnifier prices range from \$600 to \$1200
 - Important to consult low vision doctor for a prescription before obtaining magnifying equipment
- ✓ CCTV prices range from \$1,000 to \$6,000
- ✓ Quicken computer program will print checks

Banking/Bills

- ✓ Online checking
- ✓ Use a payee
- ✓ Automatic bill paying bank service
- ✓ Receive bills in Braille
- ✓ Hand Held Video Magnifier prices range from \$600 to \$1200
 - Important to consult low vision doctor for a prescription before obtaining magnifying equipment
- ✓ CCTV prices range from \$1,000 to \$6,000

Paper currency and coins

- Identifying coins
 - ✓ Quarters and dimes are rough on the edge
 - ✓ Nickles and pennies are smooth on the edge
 - Coin holders that have a separate place for each coin – prices range from \$2 to \$10
- Identifying paper currency
 - Segregation
 - Each type of bill in a different pocket
 - Divided Wallet \$8 - \$25
 - Fold each currency amount differently
 - \$1bills – not folded
 - \$5 bills – lengthwise
 - \$10 bills – widthwise
 - \$20 bills – length & width
 - Electronic Money identifier- prices start at \$99
 - New currency identifier application for cell phone <http://www.eyenote.gov/>
 - Ask that the currency be identified as the change is given with the large bills first

Additional assistive technology for financial

- ✓ Talking calculators – prices range from \$12 to \$325
- ✓ Office bundle of products: guides, ruler, and talking calculator – prices range from \$5 to \$30



“I developed a relationship with my bank so I could trust them. You have to be able to trust anyone who helps you with your finances.”

Focus Group Participant

GROOMING



Many of the skills and techniques involved in shaving do not require vision.

Hair care

- ✓ Use puff paint to identify shampoo/conditioners
- ✓ Use different size bottles to decipher which is shampoo/conditioner
- ✓ Put rubber bands on shampoo bottles and keep conditioner bottles as is
- ✓ Use a magnifying mirror to check hair
- ✓ Label shampoo with a large print #1 and conditioner with a large print #2
- ✓ Simplicity – keep hairstyle simple

Makeup

- ✓ Magnifying mirror to help apply makeup
- ✓ Apply makeup by feel
- ✓ Ask someone if makeup is applied correctly
- ✓ Use a halogen adjusting light to see more clearly – prices start at \$18
- ✓ Label each cosmetic
 - Braille tags
 - Puff paint
 - Velcro dots
- ✓ Use facial landmarks to determine where to apply products
 - Edge of the eyebrow is a good landmark for eye shadow
 - Bottom of the nose or the base of the cheekbone can form a boundary for applying blush
 - The hairline is a landmark for foundation

Shaving

- ✓ Use electric razor
- ✓ Apply shaving cream in one area at a time to make sure that area is done
- ✓ Feel face to see what has been shaved

- ✓ Have someone check to make sure the person is clean shaven
- ✓ Locating landmarks, such as a specific point on one's ear, with the hand that is not holding the razor can help in determining where to shave (or not shave)
- ✓ Use buffer pads to remove hair from legs

Nail care

- ✓ Get manicures and pedicures
- ✓ Use nail file
- ✓ Use a pair of safety clippers
- ✓ Contact the county health department regarding nail and foot care clinics
- ✓ Some counties have a monthly toe nail clinic by RSVP – prices around \$15.00
- ✓ After polishing fingernails, trace around the cuticles with a cotton swab dipped in nail polish remover to remove any excess polish from the skin
- ✓ Cool the polish in the refrigerator to make it easier to feel where it has been applied

Additional assistive technology for grooming

- Magnified lighted mirrors – prices range from \$15 to \$40
- Magnified nail and toenail clippers – prices start at \$6
- Magnified tweezers – prices start at \$4.15
- Talking scales – prices start at \$59



**“I’m 88 years old, and bald.
I’ve been married to the same
woman for 55 years. I have no
one to impress.”**

Anonymous Consumer

HEALTH CARE



Take every opportunity to educate health care providers to keep the appointment with the patient not with the guide.

Eye doctor definitions

Optometry –

Vision care specialty that deals with function and disorders of the eye, includes detection of disease and some types of management

Ophthalmology –

Medical specialty that deals with the eye its function and diseases, including diagnosis and medical/surgical management

Ophthalmologist –

Physician (MD) specializing in diagnosis and treatment of refractive, medical and surgical problems related to eye diseases and disorders

Optometrist –

Doctor of optometry (OD) specializing in vision problems, treating vision conditions with eye glasses, contact lenses, low vision aids and vision therapy, and prescribing medications for certain eye diseases. They also provide training in the use of low vision aids.

Consult with a low vision doctor when

- ✓ Ordinary eyeglasses or contact lenses do not provide clear enough vision to perform tasks such as reading, writing, driving or television viewing, special eyeglasses or low vision aids are necessary to help perform these tasks.
- ✓ An individual's current eye doctor cannot surgically or medically improve their vision; a low vision examination by a low vision eye doctor is needed.

Find a list of low vision doctors on pages 8-11.

Prescription medications

- Set up assistance
 - Pour out on contrasting cloth or plate
 - Blister packages from pharmacy
 - Personal care attendant
 - Family or friend
- Taking Medications
 - Keep medications in a certain order on the shelf
 - Medications feel different compared to others
- High and low tech assistive technology:
 - Divided pill boxes – prices range from \$2 to \$12
 - Automated pill dispensers – prices start at \$50
 - Talking pill reminders – prices start at \$40
 - Talking prescription readers – prices range from \$25 to \$30
 - Dial a dose, a sound indicates when a unit of glucose has entered the syringe – prices start at \$50

Over the counter medications

Many focus group participants reported keeping over the counter medications separate from the prescription medications. Identification was accomplished by:

- ✓ Where they store the medication on the shelf
- ✓ Size, shape or sound of pills in bottle
- ✓ Color or smell of the pills

Assistive technology for health care and a price range

Talking scales \$5-\$100

Talking thermometers \$12-\$20

Talking glucose meter \$30-\$100

Talking blood-pressure cuff \$50-\$160

Talking calorie counter/pedometer \$8-\$13

Eye-drop guide \$6-\$10



**“I go in to see my doctors
alone to make sure they talk
to me.”**

Chris Owens

HOME ORGANIZATION



People who are blind or have low vision have to find an organization system that works for them, not someone else.

Many people who are blind or have low vision have said they know where items are because when finished with an item they put it in the same spot every time. This works great until a family member or friend uses the item and does not put it back.

Examples:

- ✓ Hanging their clothes in a certain order
- ✓ Placing canned vegetables on one shelf and canned fruit on another
- ✓ Putting the remote control in the same location

Prices for assistive technology for home organization

- Remote caddy - \$10 to \$45
- Closet organizers - \$10 to \$700
- Braille labeler - \$35-\$50
- File cabinet - \$60-\$400



**“Whatever you do, put stuff back where you found it!”
Consumer at focus group**

HOUSEKEEPING



Ask the individuals if they want you to tell them when you see something needing attention like a stain on the carpet.

Dusting

- Spray dust polish on a rag not directly on the table surface
- Dust in an organized pattern
- Concentrate on one area of the room at a time

Sweeping

- When sweeping, divide the room into small sections using furniture as landmarks. Finish one section completely before moving to the next
- After sweeping dirt into a dustpan, a damp paper towel ran over the area will pick up remaining dust
- Use a vacuum or dust buster because it picks up dirt or dust and doesn't push it from place to place

Windows & table tops

- When cleaning windows, always use vertical or horizontal patterns with overlapping strokes to avoid streaking
- When cleaning tabletops use a pattern. For example, start at the far left and work towards the front edge
- Use a tray or cookie sheet at the front edge of the table to collect crumbs



“Sweeping or vacuuming barefooted allows missed dirt to be felt with the feet.”
Focus Group Participant

MOBILITY BASICS



Not all mobility issues require an O & M Specialist to help the individual who is blind or has low vision.

Age-related Macular Degeneration (ARMD) is the number one cause of vision loss for individuals over the age of 65. ARMD affects central detailed vision which could cause an individual to run into objects, trip over rugs and not read hazard signs.

Diabetic Retinopathy is the leading cause of vision loss in the United States and the person is left with vision that has been described as looking through spots or holes. It affects the person's central and peripheral vision which could cause an individual to run into objects, run into door frames or people standing beside him/her.

Glaucoma is a group of diseases that affect the optic nerve resulting in a loss of peripheral vision that could lead to tunnel vision or complete vision loss. Retinitis Pigmentosa causes the same vision loss as Glaucoma both of which can cause mobility issues by the person missing important information to the sides of the body.

Hemianopia is an eye condition that an individual can be born with or obtain after a stroke. It causes the person to only have vision out of one side of the eye. This can cause mobility issues by the person not seeing objects to his/her right or left and in extreme cases the person will forget his/her right or left side of the body even exists.

Safe mobility is very important since falls are the leading cause of death by injury for individuals who are 65 years or older and people with vision loss are twice as likely to fall as people without a visual impairment.

Steps a person can take to prevent falls

- Annual eye exams
- Wear shoes with traction
- Increase lighting

If a person is at higher risk for a fall, he/she may consider an emergency response device that he/she is able to wear.

If you are unsure what to do, call your local Orientation and Mobility Specialist. Do not try to teach someone something you do not know.

Examples of what a non-certified specialist can assist with

- ✓ Remove or move a throw rug
- ✓ Tape down electrical cords or move them to run along walls
- ✓ Mark steps with yellow paint or tape
- ✓ Install handrails
- ✓ Suggestions/ Increase lighting
- ✓ Clear pathways
- ✓ Arrange furniture
- ✓ Reduce glare
- ✓ Be a human guide

Tips for using human guide

- The traveler should lightly grasp the back of the arm of the guide above the elbow. The guide should hold their elbow in the natural position
- The traveler should stay one step behind the guide by holding his/her arm at a 90 degree angle
- The guide should walk at a normal pace unless requested to walk slower
- The guide should give verbal cues. For example, “the stair railing is on your right, approaching stairs, curb up/down, etc.”
- When going through a narrow area the guide should move his arm behind him/her to let the traveler know that he/she needs to move behind the guide as the opening is narrow
- It is important for the guide to let the person know when things such as steps are coming. This can either be done by telling the person, or stopping for a brief second before starting the steps
- Remember to watch for low tree limbs and other low hanging items that could hit the traveler’s face
- The guide should never try to send the traveler through a doorway first

- When walking through a doorway the guide should let the traveler know which side the door hinge is on and if it is a pull or push door so that the traveler can hold it open while both walk through
- The guide should never allow people to address him/her about the traveler

Prices for assistive technology for mobility

- Anti-Skid, colored tape – \$15 to \$50
- Emergency response – \$30 per month (approximate)



Hazards!

**“Throw rugs are a bad idea.”
Consumer at Focus Group**

**“Power cords are dangerous.”
Consumer at Focus Group**

RECREATION



“I don’t think people believe a person who is blind watches TV. How funny!”

Ark City Focus Group Member

One of the most important parts of many people’s lives is recreation and hobbies. Whether it is exercise and fitness to stay healthy, crafting for relaxation, or games for family time, many people believe that because of vision loss, they can no longer participate in activities for fun. With the proper equipment or accommodations, the activities they loved before they lost their vision are usually possible afterward as well. The following is not an exhaustive list, and if an activity isn’t listed here a Google search will, in many cases, show information on how people who are blind or have low vision can participate.

Exercise and fitness

- ✓ Before beginning any exercise program consult both a medical and eye doctor as some eye conditions can be affected by bending, straining, or rapid movements
- ✓ Exercise equipment with dials can be marked with large print, raised dots, tape, or puff paint to allow for them to be set independently
- ✓ Exercise cassettes or CDs can be used instead of videos as the movements are described instead of shown
- ✓ When walking, create a route to use consistently so that the person is aware of anything that could be an issue such as sudden drop-offs, tree limbs, or animals
- ✓ Tandem bicycles can be used with a family member or friend
- ✓ The National Center on Physical Activity with a Disability website has a searchable database of personal trainers

<http://www.ncpad.org/trainers/index.php?PHPSESSID=8d7b9>

Crafting

- ✓ Gooseneck lamps make it easy to position light directly on the work surface
- ✓ A tray with a raised lip might make it easier to organize and keep track of crafting materials
- ✓ Use a refrigerator magnet to locate dropped pins
- ✓ Use a magnetic pincushion for holding pins and needles
- ✓ Place scissors on a chain or ribbon around one's neck
- ✓ Use thread locks, available at most sewing stores, to keep thread from tangling
- ✓ Use self-threading needles, available at most sewing stores, as it makes threading needles easier
- ✓ When quilting, embroidery needles can be used as threading them is usually easier although the stitches will not be as small
- ✓ Use quilting pins to make a straight line which can be followed to guarantee straight stitches
- ✓ When knitting work the fingers at the front of the needle to be more aware of stitches being dropped off of the needle
- ✓ When knitting, use needles that contrast with the color of the yarn
- ✓ A cloth which contrasts with the yarn color can be draped over one's lap
- ✓ Start with larger needles and thicker yarn and then move to smaller ones
- ✓ When finishing projects for the day push the yarn to the back of the needle and place a rubber band around it so stitches won't drop off
- ✓ Patterns can be enlarged on a computer or copier
- ✓ Many patterns are available on the Internet and can be read with screen readers or screen magnification
- ✓ Instructions can also be recorded on cassette tapes or digital recorders
- ✓ Braille pattern books are also available by searching on the Internet

Cards and board games

- ✓ Many card games are available in both Braille and large print at most websites that sell products for people with vision loss. Prices range from \$2.95 for a

standard deck of playing cards with large print to \$17.95 for the game Uno with both print and Braille

- ✓ Using a card holder will allow hands to be free which will allow the use of a magnifier if necessary
- ✓ Use solid colors for table coverings to make the cards stand out
- ✓ Board games such as Monopoly and Scrabble are also available at many websites selling products for people with vision loss – prices start at \$49.95
- ✓ Many websites such as www.kitchensinc.net and <http://zanosoft.net/rsgames/> have free self voicing games for the computer (football, baseball, Monopoly, poker, and Yahtzee)

Television and movies

- ✓ Many current and classic movies with audio description, which gives a person with low or no vision an audio explanation of what is happening on the screen, are available for purchase from Amazon.com and other sites
- ✓ Audio described movies may also be available for loan from the State Talking Book Library
- ✓ Some television channels such as Turner Classic Movies (TCM) and Public Broadcasting Services (PBS) provide audio description for some of their programs through the Second Audio Program (SAP)
- ✓ A few audio described movies are also available to watch at www.narrativetv.com

Gardening

- ✓ Using landscaping fabric, corrugated cardboard or mulch can reduce the necessity of weeding
- ✓ Use long boards or bricks to establish where one area ends and another begins
- ✓ Paint existing fencing with contrasting colors such as yellow to contrast with the green grass
- ✓ Container gardening or raised plant beds will give a solid boundary to maintain
- ✓ Use yogurt cartons with the bottom cut out to outline young seedlings

- ✓ A fishing line or cane can be used to make straight rows
- ✓ Look for commercially available tools with brightly colored handles that will contrast with plants
- ✓ Use an egg carton with the bottom of each circle cut off as a spacing guide for seeds
- ✓ When mowing use landmarks such as trees or shrubs for orientation

Reading

- ✓ Books and magazines are available to people who are blind or have low vision through the National Library Service (NLS). For more information in Kansas go to <http://www.kslib.info/talking/> or contact the State Talking Book Library at 1-800-362-0699. Nationwide go to <http://www.loc.gov/nls> or call 1-888-658-7323
- ✓ Audio books can also be purchased at many stores where books or CDs are purchased
- ✓ Audio books are also available for checkout at many public libraries



“If bread is the first necessity of life, recreation is a close second.”
Edward Bellamy

SHOPPING



When you are shopping with someone make sure the cashier speaks directly to the individual who is blind or has low vision and gives the change to him or her.

Most people who are blind or have low vision use a personal assistant and/or assistive technology to do grocery, clothing, or household shopping independently.

There are four types of personal assistants

- ✓ Informal – A relative or friend
- ✓ Formal – HCBS Waiver or private pay Personal Care Attendant
- ✓ Commercial – Personal shopper provided by retail store
 - Needs to be requested 24 hours in advance
 - My name is... I'm blind, I would like some assistance, I'll be there at this time
- ✓ Computer – Online shopping

Help the individual explore the potential of each option. Once he/she has made his/her choice the next step is to determine a method of labeling the shopping items.

Labeling

- ✓ **Groceries**
 - Rubber bands on cans
 - Different shaped stickers
 - Different textured stickers/ letters
 - Touch to See Letters – prices starting at \$15.95 for 176 pieces
 - Raised large print & Braille letters and numbers
 - Organization – Select a spot in cabinet or refrigerator for each item

✓ Clothing

- Small safety pins in clothing label
 - Ex: Left corner means black, right corner means blue
- Cuts in clothing label
- Thread in clothing label
-
- Braille Clothing tags- prices starting at 29.95 for 100 tags
 - Sewn onto clothing to identify color and patterns
- Organization – Arrange closet by color

Low tech to high tech assistive technology for shopping

- Magnifier – prices range from \$25 to \$150
- Hand Held Video Magnifier prices range from \$600 to \$1200
 - Important to consult low vision doctor for a prescription before obtaining magnifying equipment
- Bar code reader – prices range from \$1,000 to \$7, 000
 - Important to consult an ATK Access site for funding assistance



Don says he uses a discount store personal shopper. He calls one day in advance to arrange for his shopper. The personal shopper marks his items with different shapes and sizes of stickers before they go in his shopping cart. Once he gets home he is able to put his groceries away and cook independently. Best part of story? Don uses the stores price stickers to mark his groceries!

SOCIALIZATION



Tell someone when you are leaving. Talking to the air all alone is not fun.

Whether it's a networking opportunity with colleagues, a family gathering, church function or a chance meeting with an old friend, socialization for someone experiencing vision loss presents certain challenges. These will differ depending upon the individual's usable vision. Some of the challenges are listed below with tips to deal with these challenges.

Lonely and blue - While others mingle, those with little or no usable vision are left sitting and waiting for people to interact with them. This individual often feels alone, trapped and very bored.

Tip: Don't be afraid to make people aware that this is an issue. Sometimes using assistive technology such as a talking watch to check the time or talking cell phone can start a conversation.

Stuck in the middle - Sometimes the individual and a companion are chatting with some folks and the companion sees someone else he/she wishes to talk to and leaves the individual to continue the conversation. After the conversation ends, others move on to mingle stranding the individual in the middle of nowhere. At this point, he/she is stuck not knowing where he/she is in relationship to the room. This is a very uncomfortable feeling, almost as if he/she is incompetent.

Tip: Discuss this with a companion making him/her aware of the issue. Sometimes, if the person has an idea of the room, he/she can at least get out of the middle so he/she isn't so conspicuous.

Who am I? – One of the most uncomfortable social situations occurs when the person with vision loss is out and about and someone from the past stops them and says, “Do

you know who I am?” It’s rather uncomfortable for the person to admit he/she has forgotten this person’s voice after 30 years!

Tip: Though it is uncomfortable, the best response to this question is “no, I don’t know who you are”. Voices change over the years and so it is unlikely that the voice is the same as it was years ago.

You talkin’ to me? – Often the person is out in the community and he/she is unsure if someone is speaking to him/her. This is due to cell phone use or other individuals involved in the conversation. For example “You look really nice today.” The question then becomes, who looks really nice today? Me? My friend? Someone walking down the street? Do I say, “thank you”?

Tip: It is okay to ask “are you talking to me?” It is also absolutely imperative to look at things with a sense of humor. Sometimes, it is that humor that gets us through these uncomfortable situations.

I ain’t got no body! – Because of using a cane and keeping it in front of the person’s body or because the individual is feeling out of place and crossing his/her arms in front of the body, people’s body language is closed and sometimes has a “keep away from me” message.

Tip: A smile can go a long way toward making the person seem friendly. The person should always try to smile even when he/she may not really want to. He/she may never know when someone is looking at him/her. If it isn’t necessary for the cane to be in front of the person, move it to the side.

Let’s shake on it! – Another challenge in a social situation is knowing when to or not to shake hands. Offering to shake hands when the other individual is not in a position to shake is rather embarrassing. It’s also very uncomfortable to learn someone wanted to shake hands but the person with vision loss was unaware until it was too late. These situations also put the sighted person in an uncomfortable spot.

Tip: It is okay to verbalize one’s desire to shake hands.

Just a touch away – Touching, such as hugging or putting a hand on someone’s shoulder is a natural part of mingling. However, if someone has some vision loss it

becomes a guessing game. Does the other person's body language indicate they don't want to be touched? Do they have food or drink in their hands that might spill if they are hugged? If I reach out to touch them on the shoulder, will I accidentally put my hand somewhere inappropriate? These fears often make people with vision loss appear unfriendly, rude, stiff or snobbish.

Tip: If unsure ask "can I give you a hug?" or "is it okay if I put my hand on your shoulder?" That allows the person with vision loss to still show feelings through touching, without the awkwardness.

Let's eat – Networking events frequently have a buffet set up for people to enjoy. Well, if a person has a visual loss the enjoyment level goes down. If he/she isn't with a companion, food probably won't happen. If the individual has a companion, does the person with vision loss go through the line or sit and wait to be served? What kind of food is being served? Do I have a choice? At other times there might be finger foods, but how does the person know this?

Tip: If attending an event alone, it is okay and necessary to inform the host of the meeting that assistance will be needed through the food line. If a companion is assisting the person, it is important to discuss how the situation will be handled.

Pass me by – It is a myth that people with visual disabilities cannot pass food, handouts or other materials. It is the eyes that do not work, not the hands/arms!

Tip: Pretty much self-explanatory.



The truth is there is no way to eliminate these challenges. The best we can do is give suggestions that may make people less uncomfortable and let them know they aren't alone.

TRANSPORTATION



Bioptic telescopes allow people with stable low vision to drive. Consult an eye care professional and the state department of motor vehicles for more information.

One of the most difficult parts of losing one's sight is the realization that driving may no longer be possible. It becomes much more difficult to make plans if the person doesn't have transportation. Especially in rural areas, it may be difficult to find rides for even the most basic things like going to medical appointments or grocery shopping. The tips in this section, while they won't provide transportation, may give ideas that can be used to solve the transportation issue.

Bus & taxi

- ✓ Many cities and counties provide either a fixed route or a Para transit bus system
- ✓ Where there is no Para-transit, vouchers may be provided by local government agencies to offset the cost of using taxis
- ✓ When using Para-transit buses, the ride will usually have to be scheduled at least 24 hours in advance

Medical transportation

- ✓ If receiving Medicaid, medical transportation may be paid for through the Medicaid card. In Kansas, Medical Transportation Management is the

transportation provider. For more information call 888-240-6497 or consult the local Medicaid provider

- ✓ In most cases, medical transportation through MTM must be scheduled at least 48 hours in advance

Air & train travel

- ✓ When traveling by airplane, the airline must provide assistance both on and off the plane and during any connecting flights
- ✓ It is advisable to let the airline know assistance will be needed a week or so in advance, and then confirm with them 24 hours before the flight
- ✓ If traveling on Amtrak, a person with a vision loss, who uses a personal care attendant, may ask for a reduced price for their ticket



“Okay here’s the deal, driving and blindness don’t exactly go well together. As a matter of fact, they shouldn’t go together at all although in my past life they did a few times but that is a story for another time.”
Roger Frischenmeyer