

# Blind & Low Vision

## First Responder Training Video Series—Information Sheet

Provided by the County  
of San Diego Office of  
Emergency Services

This document provides a brief summary of the information presented in the first responder training video relating to those members of our community who are blind or have low vision.

### Understanding individuals who are blind or have low vision:

- An individual who is blind may have low vision or no vision at all.
- In an emergency situation, treat any person with a visual impairment as if they are totally blind.

### Visual cues to look for:

- Individuals who are blind or have low vision may possess a long white cane or walker with red tape. Be sure to keep any mobility device they use with them.
- They may stare in the direction of your voice, but may not make eye contact.

### How to approach an individual who is visually impaired:

- State your name, title, the nature of the emergency, and ask how you can assist them.
- Respect their personal space and ask permission before touching them.
- Be sure you are facing them when speaking.
- Treat them as you would treat anyone else.

### Using the Human Guide Technique:

- Ask the individual if they would like assistance.
- Allow the person to grab your arm, above the elbow. Make sure they are comfortable. Do NOT grab their hand to guide them.
- Hold your arm in a relaxed fashion so they may link their arm with yours for better support.
- In narrow areas, move your arm behind your back so they know to follow behind you.
- Remember to use descriptive language and be very specific about the environment (“Turn left 15 paces in front of you”). When approaching a door, let them know how far away it is and which way the door opens. When approaching stairs, let them know if you are going up or down, if there is a handrail, and when you reach the bottom.
- When there is a guide dog present:
  - Always ask permission before handling a guide dog. Lead the guide dog using the leash, not the harness. Always guide the person on the opposite side of the dog.
  - The guide dog should always remain with its owner.

### Special thanks to the following organizations for participating in this video:

San Diego Center for the Blind  
Heartland Fire & Rescue  
San Diego Fire—Rescue

