

Working with Blind and Low Vision Colleagues

A Quick Reference for Coworkers

*Creating an inclusive workplace does not require special expertise. A welcoming workplace starts with one simple rule: when in doubt, **just ask!** Most people are happy to share their preferences and the accommodations or strategies that help them work most effectively.*

Vision Loss Looks Different for Everyone

Most people with vision loss are not totally blind. Some can read print, identify faces, or travel independently, while others have difficulty seeing details, navigating unfamiliar spaces, or seeing in certain lighting conditions. Do not assume what your colleague can or cannot see - let them tell you.

Assistive Technology

Your colleague may use tools like screen readers (JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver), screen magnifiers, braille displays, apps on mobile devices, or a white cane. You don't need to be an expert in these - it's just helpful to know they exist. Be aware that files and software that are not accessible with their technology make their job harder.

Accessible Documents and Emails

More than 95% of blind and low vision workers say inaccessible digital content is their biggest challenge at work. Creating accessible documents is an easy way to support your colleague. Easy fixes:

- Use heading styles in Word (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.)
- Add alt text to all images
- Avoid sending text as images (such as screenshots) or scanned PDFs
- Use easily readable fonts (like Arial, Tahoma) and good color contrast for coworkers with low vision

Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook, Adobe Acrobat, and Canva all have a built-in accessibility checker. Run it before you share.

Day-to-Day Interaction

You don't need to feel nervous about day-to-day interactions. A few simple habits go a long way.

- Introduce yourself by name every time - even if you think they will recognize your voice.
- Say your colleague's name when speaking to them, so they know you are addressing them.
- At meetings, list who is in the room and use names when people speak.

- Notify your colleague when you leave: "I'll be back in a few minutes."
- Describe visual information they cannot see: "Your supervisor just walked in."
- Give specific directions: "The chair is two feet ahead at 11 o'clock" - not "over there."
- Everyday words like *see*, *look*, and *watch* are fine to use.
- Distribute any materials that will be referenced during meetings in advanced, giving colleagues the opportunity to review the information and access it in their preferred format.

If They Have a Guide Dog

Only a minority of blind or low vision individuals use guide dogs. If your colleague does:

- Interact with the person, not the dog.
- Do not pet, feed, or distract the dog.
- Remember that the dog is working, even when it looks relaxed or cute.

Orienting to the Workspace

Offering a walk-through of the physical workspace is a really helpful thing you can do for a new colleague. Point out:

- Overall room layout and hallway routes
- Key landmarks and unique features (stairs, alcoves, tightly packed areas)
- Doorways or cabinets that protrude into walkways
- Security systems or badge readers
- Posted signs or wall directories

This helps your colleague build independence right away.

Important: Do not move anything in the physical environment without letting your colleague know. Inform individuals of any temporary changes to the environment, such as blocked pathways, out-of-order restrooms, construction or painting, relocated furniture, or maintenance work, as these changes may affect navigation.

Offering Help

Your colleague will ask when they need help. If you think they might need help, ask first rather than jumping in. If they request physical guidance, offer your elbow and walk at a normal pace.

Plan Events with Access in Mind

Think about accessibility when organizing team activities - not after the fact. Ask: Could everyone fully participate? If not, adjust the plan to make it inclusive.

Keep It in Perspective

- Your colleague is a professional who gets the work done with different tools.
- Do not praise them for accomplishing ordinary tasks.

- Relax - talking with them is the same as talking with anyone else.
- Your colleague should not have to educate everyone or be the representative for blindness/low vision. There are many free resources you can use to learn more.

Creating an inclusive workplace takes openness and a willingness to ask rather than make assumptions. Blindness and low vision may affect how your colleague completes some tasks, but not their value, skill, or role on the team.

Resources

- [NRTC short courses](#)
- [Employer toolkit: Allyship in the workplace – Perkins School for the Blind](#)
- [How To Be More Inclusive and Helpful to Co-Workers Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired | Envision Blog](#)
- [4 Ways to Create an Inclusive Workplace for Blind and Visually Impaired Employees - Senior Executive](#)
- [APH Connect Center](#)
- [Accessibility Resources | The National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision](#)
- [Questions About Vision Loss | The National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision](#)
- [Project 1: AT in the Workplace | The NRTC on Blindness and Low Vision](#)