

Orientation and Mobility

Skills and Techniques for EVS Paraprofessionals

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What Is Orientation and Mobility Instruction?

Orientation and mobility instruction is a related service for students who are blind and visually impaired to teach them special skills and techniques for moving about safely (mobility) and with understanding (orientation). During orientation and mobility lessons students are taught to:

- **walk safely, gracefully, and with awareness of their surroundings using a guide, self-protective techniques, or a travel tool, such as a long cane**
- **use any available vision they may have to learn about their surroundings and avoid danger**
- **use their other senses, primarily their senses of hearing and touch**
- **understand their body and how it moves, how the environment is laid out, and their relationship to their surroundings**
- **keep track of where they are as they move about**
- **describe the routes they use to go from one place to another**
- **plan travel routes**
- **become aware of and know how to use the features in indoor and outdoor settings, such as doors, elevators, traffic lights, crosswalks**
- **become aware of and know how to use community resources such as stores, banks, the post office, public transportation**
- **develop social and judgment skills necessary for interacting with others, asking for and declining assistance, correcting mistakes, solving problems, and dealing with the unexpected**
- **apply their skills to building independence for school and community activities**

Your Roles and Responsibilities As An EVS Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Para

Your Job

The orientation and mobility (O&M) paraprofessional provides specialized support for safe, systematic, and purposeful travel in school activities for students who are blind or visually impaired.

An O&M paraprofessional is assigned when a student who is blind or visually impaired requires a guide to move safely from place to place during school activities. When assigned, the O&M paraprofessional reinforces orientation and mobility skills for independent movement and safety.

Your Responsibilities

Under the supervision of the EVS administration and in cooperation with the O&M and classroom teacher, the O&M paraprofessional will:

- Act as a guide, as appropriate, for the student during school activities. Examples of activities during which students may need to be guided include: going to and from the school bus, moving about the classroom and school building, class changes, field trips, fire drills, etc.
- Monitor student's travel for safety and promote independence for school travel activities
- Maintain communication with the O&M teacher, the classroom teacher, and the EVS administration to discuss mobility related issues
- Participate as a member of the instructional team to support the general instructional program

Your Roles & Responsibilities - Points to Remember!

- Follow the directions you receive from the O&M and classroom teachers.
- Guide students safely using the correct O&M techniques.
- Monitor students' safety throughout the school day.
- Encourage students to use the correct O&M techniques and move about as independently as possible.
- Help students practice their O&M techniques, as directed.
- Speak to students clearly using a regular tone of voice.
- Communicate with families and others only as directed by the teacher.
- Respect students' confidentiality and privacy.

Communicating With Your Students!

Always Introduce Yourself!

- Tell students your name when you approach them.
- Don't play the "who am I?" game with your students.
- Help students learn to recognize your voice.

Avoid Surprises!

- Let students know when you are about to touch them.
- Tell students when you are handing things to them.
- Tell students about their surroundings.
- Tell students where you are going when you begin to guide them.
- Describe the route you and your student will take.
- Point out landmarks, turns, and interesting things along the way.
- Tell students when you have arrived.
- Tell students when you leave them, or when others have left.

Match Words with Experiences!

- Use your student's name when you give instructions that include the word "you." For example, "Will you please come here, Zulay?"
- Talk about what you are doing as you do it – "now we are turning around," "now I am bending down."
- Give students references when you use the words "this," "that," and "there." For example, "your coat is there, on the first hook next to the door." "The door is on this side of the room, near the teacher's desk where we are standing."
- Tell students the meaning of sounds they hear around them. For example: it sounds like the halls are crowded, the traffic is heavy, the rain is light, the roads are wet, etc.
- Demonstrate how some common sounds your student hears are made.

Communicating With Your Students!

Talk the Talk!

- Use the terms for the mobility techniques when you are with your students so these terms become familiar.
- Refer to the mobility techniques using the correct terminology. For example, talk about “trailing” the wall rather than following the wall.
- Refer to the student’s long cane as the “cane.” Avoid referring to the cane as a “stick.”
- Talk to the student about using “cane technique” rather than “caning.”

Walk the Walk!

- Follow the same route each time you guide your student.
- Tell your student when you are at the starting point of each route.
- Walk at your student’s regular pace.
- Tell your student when you have to slow down, speed up, or start running.
- Tell your student when you will turn, step up, or step down.

Promote Safety and Curiosity!

- Welcome your student’s questions.
- Build “the safety habit” by requiring correct technique.
- When something is new, ask students to place their hands on yours to explore it.
- Guide student’s hands gently and follow a system when you help students explore.
- Encourage students to explore on their own, and be safety conscious.
- Remind students that you are always interested in what they discover.

Don’t Shelter, Don’t Censor, Don’t Baby!

- Tell students what is going on, and what their sighted peers see.
- Give students the same information their sighted peers have, whether it is good, bad, sad, or disturbing.
- Step back! Give students time to respond, try things out, and do things on their own
- Avoid doing for students what they are able to do for themselves!

There Is Another Way to Say This!

“What did you do that for?”

“This is the way to do it.”

“Don’t you know any better?”

“Let’s do this together.”

“Can’t you just pay attention?”

“Listen to this.”

**“Just try a little harder
and you will do it right.”**

“Let’s try it this way.”

“You’ve made a mistake.”

“Make this change and it will be right.”

“How often have I told you this?”

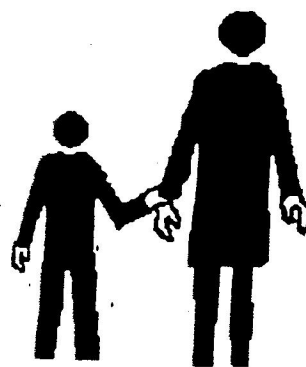
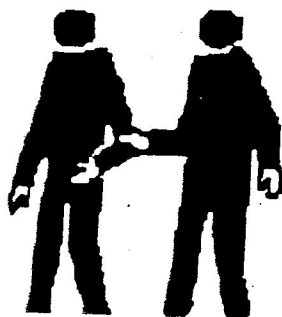
“This is how you can do it.”

“You are not trying!”

“Tell me what is difficult for you.”

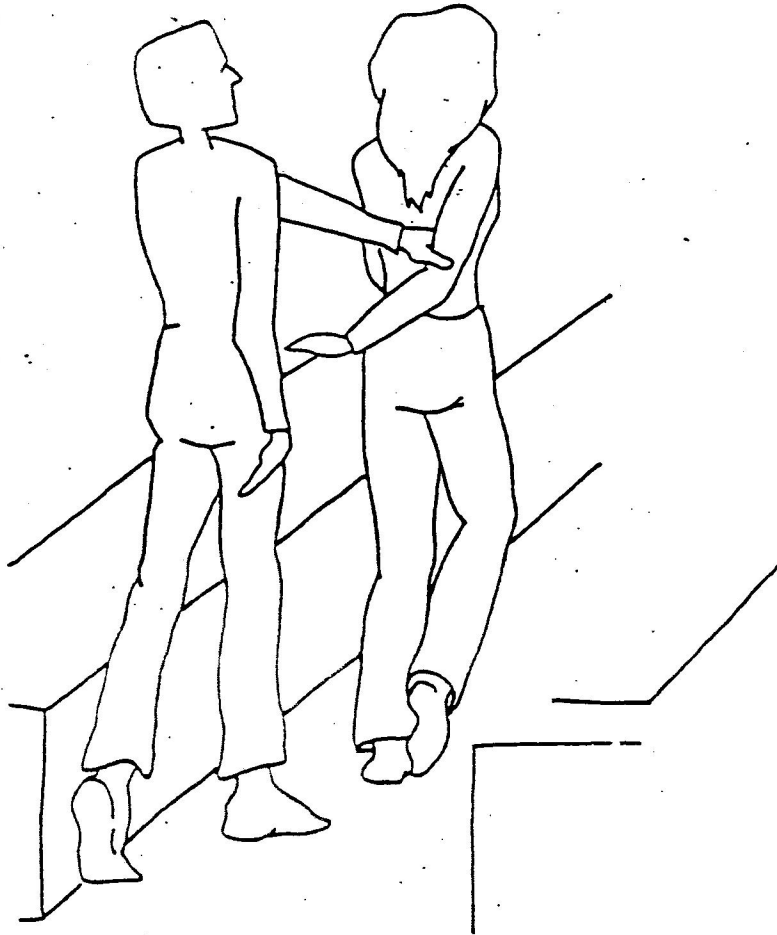
The Human Guide Technique (Also Called The "Sighted" Guide Technique)

- The student holds the guide's arm and walks a little behind the guide and to the guide's side. The student grasps the guide firmly with the thumb on the outside of the guide's arm and the four fingers curled around the inside of the guide's arm. Students should not grasp the guide's clothing.
- **THE STUDENT ALWAYS HOLDS ONTO AND FOLLOWS THE GUIDE. THE GUIDE NEVER HOLDS THE STUDENT. NEVER PUSH OR PULL YOUR STUDENT.**
- Young students can take the guide's wrist, older students can grasp just above the guide's elbow.
- The guide always checks that there is enough room from side-to-side and overhead to pass safely with the student.
- The guide hesitates before making a turn, stepping up, or stepping down with the student.
- Some students may use their cane when they are walking with a guide. This is fine. It allows the student to gain additional information and identifies the student as being visually impaired.



The Human Guide Technique in Congested Areas and Narrow Spaces

- **The guide brings the arm the student is holding behind his/her back. The student steps behind the guide, keeps a firm grasp on the guide, and follows the guide in tandem.**
- **The guide can tell the student a few steps in advance that a narrow or congested area is coming up, or can allow the student to follow the guide's body's movement, depending on the student's level of skill.**
- **The guide resumes the side-by-side position of the human guide technique when the pair is out of the narrow or congested area.**



The Human Guide Technique and Negotiating Doors

- The guide lets the student know that they are approaching a door. This can be done verbally, or the guide can allow the student to figure this out from the guide's body movements.
- The guide tells the student whether the doors swing in or out, and whether the door's hinges are on the right or left.
- The guide opens the door for the student so the pair can pass through. The student may switch from one side of the guide to the other before going through the door, depending on which of the guide's arms is being used, and on which side the door's hinges are located. (See "switching," described below.)
- Students can help their guides by holding doors open as the pair goes through the doorway, and pulling doors shut as the pair leaves.

"Switching"

- The student switches sides by:
 1. taking the hand of his/her free arm (the one not holding the guide) and placing it above the hand that is holding the guide.
 2. releasing the hand that was used to grasp the guide originally, and bringing this hand across the guide's back to grasp the guide's other arm. (The student is now standing behind the guide, holding both of the guide's arms.)
 3. releasing the second hand's grasp on the guide, bringing this hand across the guide's back to the guide's other arm, and grasping the guide just above the first hand the student placed there. (The student is now standing behind the guide's side, holding one of the guide's arms with two hands.)
 4. releasing the lower hand holding the guide, moving to the guide's side, and completing the switch.

The Human Guide Technique and Negotiating Stairs

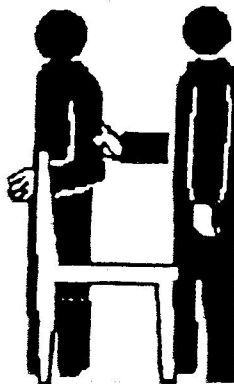
- **The guide lets the student know several steps in advance that stairs are ahead. The guide tells the student whether the stairs go up or down.**
- **The guide and student may need to switch sides (see “Switching”) so the student approaches the stairs with the student on the side of the handrail.**
- **The guide and student approach the stairway squarely using the human guide technique.**
- **The guide and student pause at the bottom or top of the stairs and line up side-by-side. The student continues to grasp the guide’s arm firmly.**
- **The guide helps the student find and grasp the handrail.**
- **The guide goes up or down the stairway starting first, the student follows holding the guide. The guide is one step ahead of the student on the stairs.**
- **The student and guide continue on the stairs in the human guide position, with the student firmly grasping the guide’s arm (above the elbow or at the wrist). The guide will always be one step ahead of the student on the stairs.**
- **The guide hesitates at the top or bottom step to signal the student that they are approaching the end of the stairway. The student and guide continue to the end of the stairway in the human guide position. The guide can tell the student that they are reaching the top or bottom of the stairway when hesitating, or allow the student to anticipate this from the guide’s movement.**
- **The guide and student step off the stairway and continue walking using the human guide technique.**

The Human Guide Technique and Seating

- **The guide and the student approach the chair from behind.**
- **The guide extends the arm the student is holding, and touches the top of the chair back.**
- **The student relaxes the grasp on the guide's arm, follows down along the guide's arm to touch the chair back.**
- **The student pivots around the chair, checks the chair seat with his/her free hand, and takes a seat.**

OR

- **The guide and the student approach the chair from in front.**
- **The guide extends the arm the student is holding, and touches the seat of the chair.**
- **The student relaxes the grasp on the guide's arm, follows down along the guide's arm to touch the seat. The student checks the chair seat with his/her free hand.**
- **The student turns around, places the back of his/her legs against the front of the chair, and takes a seat.**



The Self-Protective Techniques

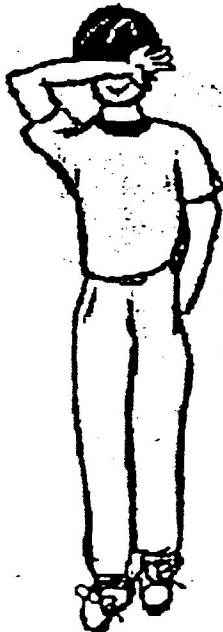
Students who are blind and visually impaired use self-protective techniques to protect themselves from objects at chest/head height or at the groin level. Students use these techniques under supervision, in areas with which they are familiar.

I. Upper Body Protective Technique

- The student's arm is raised straight out from the shoulder.
- The student's elbow is bent at a 90-degree angle, with the forearm held horizontally or diagonally across the chest. The palm faces outward, the fingers are relaxed and slightly curled with the fingertips directly in front of the student's shoulder or neck at a distance of about 8-10 inches.

II. Lower Body Protective Technique

- The student's arm is lowered diagonally in front of the body's midline.
- The palm faces inward, the fingers are relaxed and slightly curled with the fingertips about 6" in front of the body.



**UPPER BODY
PROTECTION**



**LOWER BODY
PROTECTION**

The Direction-Taking Techniques

Students who are blind and visually impaired use direction-taking techniques to establish or keep a straight line of travel. Students position their bodies parallel or perpendicular to a flat or straight surface before walking forward when they use these techniques.

Direction taking techniques include “squaring off” and “aligning.” These techniques are helpful for going across wide spaces such as classrooms or hallways, or crossing school corridors where they intersect. Students use direction-taking techniques under supervision in areas with which they are familiar.

Direction taking techniques should be used together with the self-protective techniques or the long cane.

- **Squaring Off**

The student positions the entire body or parts of the body squarely against a straight or flat surface such as a wall, a desk, or the bottom stair on a stairway. When students place the back of their feet or shoulders against a surface to “square off,” both feet or shoulder blades must be placed squarely and evenly against the straight or flat surface.

- **Aligning**

The student positions the side of the body against a straight or flat surface such as a wall, a desk, or the wall at a corridor’s intersection. When the student is “aligned,” it is important to be sure that the body part along the flat surface is straight.

Trailing

Students who are blind and visually impaired use the trailing technique to establish and keep a straight line of travel parallel to a surface, such as a wall or a handrail. When trailing, students keep one arm extended in front, use the back of their hand or the long cane to contact the surface that will be trailed, and remain in contact with this surface as they move ahead.

Trailing helps students learn about their environment, walk in a straight line, and lets them find specific landmarks they may be looking for, such as a classroom door in a school hallway. Some advanced students can trail – or follow - along a surface using sound cues.

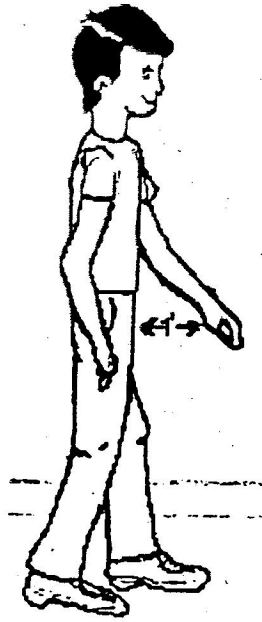
Students may need to use the self-protective techniques when they are trailing. This depends on whether or not there are obstacles along the surface the student is trailing.

Students use the trailing technique under supervision in areas with which they are familiar.

The Trailing Technique

- The student stands parallel to the surface that will be trailed, for example, a wall.
- The student's arm closest to the surface, or wall, is extended downward and forward at an angle of about 45 degrees.
- The student's palm faces inward, the fingers are relaxed and curled, the back of the fingers, or only the pinky finger, lightly brush the trailing surface.
- The student walks along the surface being trailed staying parallel to the surface, and keeps the trailing arm in the correct position.

TRAILING



Safety First!

- **The student always holds onto the guide for travel. The guide never pushes or pulls a student along.**

- **When you leave a student be sure that he or she:**
 1. **is seated safely in a chair, or**
 2. **is securely in contact with a wall or furniture,**
 3. **is being supervised by the appropriate school personnel, and**
 4. **knows that you are leaving and who is there to provide assistance, if needed.**

- **Warn your student clearly and calmly about upcoming obstacles in their path. Tell students what to expect and/or how to protect themselves.**

- **Rehearse with the O&M and classroom teachers the ways you and your student will work together to react to obstacles and dangers.**

- **If you see a student is about to bump into an obstacle, react calmly and quickly.**
 1. **You can place the fleshy part of your hand between the student's head and the obstacle so if the student bumps, it is into your hand.**
 2. **You can reach out and grasp the student's shoulder firmly from behind.**

Common Dangers For Students Who Are Blind and Visually Impaired

- **Doors that are left ajar – i.e., doors that are neither fully opened nor fully closed**
- **Classroom chairs that are not pushed under desks**
- **Chairs, tables, easels, or other classroom items that are left in aisles or hallways**
- **Chairs, tables, or other classroom furniture that are moved out of place before students know that changes have been made**
- **Small objects, such as books, toys, pens/pencils, or backpacks that are left on classroom floors, school hallways, or stairways**
- **Objects such as fire extinguishers, water fountains, telephone booths, and bulletin board cases that protrude into hallways where students are trailing**
- **Branches that overhang the sidewalk, street signs that protrude at head height, and traffic control boxes that protrude at intersections**
- **Steps or drop-offs that are in the middle of rooms, hallways, or sidewalks**
- **Platforms, ramps, or stair landings that do not have raised edge protection or railings**
- **Handrails that end before the top or bottom of a staircase**
- **Loud persistent noise, such the sound of a fan, a jackhammer, a siren, or an airplane overhead. This kind of noise can make it difficult for students to hear, or pay attention to teachers and other responsible individuals.**
- **Bright glare, poor lighting, or sudden changes in lighting that interfere with students who rely on their available vision**
- **Mixing up right and left when giving directions**

Cane Safety & Etiquette

- **Be sure students fold their canes close to their bodies to avoid poking others.**
- **Be sure students open their canes by unfolding them slowly directly in front of their bodies.**
- **Remind students to keep their canes out of classroom, auditorium, cafeteria, and school bus aisles when canes are not being used.**
- **Remember where your student stores his or her cane when it is not in use.**
- **Know where the O&M or classroom teacher stores spare canes.**
- **Notify the classroom and O&M teachers immediately if your student's cane breaks.**
- **Pay attention that students swing their canes in an arc that is no wider than their shoulder width.**
- **Encourage students to tap canes quietly and keep cane tips low to the ground.**
- **Remind students to pause briefly before entering a crowded hallway, school bus, or other congested space with their cane.**
- **Students, teachers, and paraprofessionals must never use a cane as a pointer.**
- **Students, teachers, and paraprofessional must never interfere with the student's cane while it is in use.**
- **Immediately report any incidents that involve a student's cane to the classroom teacher. Communicate this information to the appropriate EVS personnel.**

Credits

These materials were developed by the orientation and mobility teachers at Educational Vision Services (EVS). They were compiled and written by Elga Joffee, COMS, EVS Program Coordinator under the direction of Laurence Gardner, Ed.D. EVS Director.

EVS wishes to thank Erin Flaherty, COMS for the artwork illustrating the O&M techniques.

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