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.

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