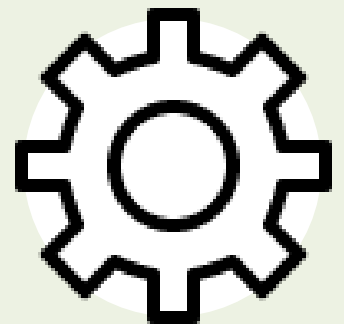


● **henshaws**

*beyond expectations*

July 2021



# ● **henshaws** **mobility guide**

20 Mobility Tips for People with a Visual Impairment

Getting out and about safely, and having good orientation and mobility skills, is crucial to independence. Some visually impaired people may initially lack the confidence to get out and about, however with the appropriate tools and skills, it is possible for visually impaired people to maintain their independence when travelling from A to B.

This eBook provides some top tips to equip you with the knowledge and skills to travel safely, independently and confidently.

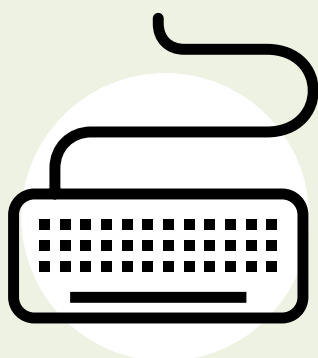
This eBook also offers advice for sighted people, giving best practices for supporting a visually impaired person to navigate their surroundings.

Please note: The advice in this eBook is not exhaustive. For advice and support personalised to your needs, it is recommended that you contact your local sensory team who can carry out an assessment and discuss your individual needs.

If you have any advice of your own to share not covered in this eBook, we would love to hear from you. Ways to get in touch are at the end of this eBook.

## Contents

1. General Advice	1
2. Using Public Transport	3
3. Using Technology	4
4. Skills for sighted people	6
Get in touch with Henshaws	7



# • general advice

## **Enquire about appropriate training**

Ensure you receive appropriate training as this will ensure you are given advice and support personalised to your needs. After an initial assessment, a rehabilitation officer will be able to support you in finding the most appropriate mobility aid, planning safe routes and ensuring you have the skills to travel safely and with confidence.

## **Indicate to others that you have a visual impairment**

Indicating your visual impairment will allow others to support and accommodate you in the most appropriate manner.

To indicate your visual impairment to others, use a mobility aid (cane or guide dog) and ensure it is visible. It may also be worth wearing bright clothing, especially in darker conditions, so that you are visible to other pedestrians and road users.

## **Ensure you have the right equipment**

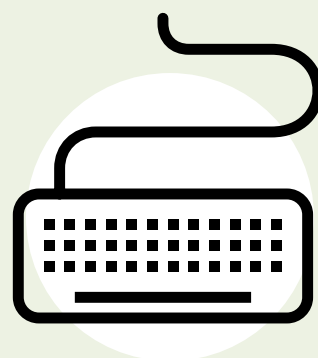
Ensure you have the equipment you need and that it is in good condition. This can include ensuring you have the most appropriate mobility aid, any technology that may support you (see Section 3) and anything else that may help such as appropriate clothing and footwear. You might also want to consider carrying emergency cash for if ever you run into any difficulties.

## **Plan your journey**

Plan your journey in advance if possible so that when you travel the journey, the process will be less stressful, plus you are less likely to encounter difficulties.

When planning your journey, consider useful landmarks, safe road crossing points and other elements that may help you such as changes in pavement texture and tactile paving to indicate steps and road crossings.

A rehabilitation officer will be able to help with route planning.



# • investigate mobility aids

Having the most appropriate mobility aid will ensure that you can travel safely, confidently, independently and will also help you to get the most appropriate support from other people. There are different mobility aids available, depending on your level of vision and your needs. These include:

- **Symbol cane** – This is used by visually impaired people with residual vision to indicate to others that they have a visual impairment. It is the shortest of the different types of cane (about 75cm in length). It is usually held diagonally across the lower body from hand to the opposite foot. The cane can be held like a long pencil; it should not touch the floor or be held out horizontally in front. The symbol cane is not used to detect obstacles to aid navigation. Watch our **video** to learn more.
- **Guide cane** – This cane is longer than a symbol cane and can be used for basic obstacle detection and depth perception. Guide canes are matched to a person's height and are used in the diagonal cane position. This cane can sometimes touch the floor; it may be used to follow a skirting board, or to detect an obstacle such as a table. This cane requires an amount of training, which would be provided by a rehabilitation officer.
- **Long cane** – This is the longest cane, and it is important to have a long cane appropriate to your height (the top of the cane should reach above your breast bone). This cane is swept from side to side along the ground to help you find obstacles and other features such as tactile paving and steps. There are also different tips for canes, including the roller tip, roller ball and all-terrain **Huju tip**. When you receive cane training, the rehabilitation officer will be able to advise on the most appropriate cane tip.
- **Guide Dog** – Once you are confident with orientation and mobility skills, you may want to consider applying for a guide dog. Applying for and being matched with a guide dog is often a lengthy process so it is still important to have good cane skills. Visit **Guide Dogs for the Blind** for more information.

You can watch our **video**, which gives an overview of what the different canes are used for. We also have a **video** explaining how to use the different types of cane.

You can also read our **definitive guide** to the different mobility canes.



# • using public transport

## Plan your journey

When taking a journey using public transport, it is recommended that you plan in advance, if possible.

Investigate the best, and safest, way to get to your destination and exactly what modes of transport you will need to use.

Consider the best way to research timetable information. This could involve using an app or website, or using technology to access timetable displays.

For train timetables, we recommend **Train Times**, a website designed specifically to provide accessible train timetables. For bus timetables, we recommend **Moovit**.

Think about how you will purchase tickets if you need to – for example, if travelling by train, you can use an app such as **Trainline** to purchase tickets, or you may prefer to purchase tickets by phone or at the station.

## Book assistance

If possible, book assistance in advance. This can make journeys less stressful and can give you more reassurance that you will get to where you need to be smoothly.

If you are travelling by train, each rail company has a dedicated assistance telephone number. On the National Rail website, there is a **list of dedicated numbers** so you can easily find the one you need. There is also an app available, **Passenger Assistance by Transreport**, which enables you to book assistance via your smartphone.

When booking assistance, consider what you may need. For example, consider if you need assistance to find the correct platform, or just to find your seat.

## Accessibility Features

When planning your journey, investigate and consider accessible features of the public transport. This could include:

- Audible announcements
- Tactile paving at platforms and stops
- Step-free access

If these features are not available, have a back-up plan, for example using technology to discover your location (see section 3), asking for information from the driver or fellow passengers or investigating a more accessible route if necessary.

## Know your location

It is important to have strategies in place so that you can identify your location as you are travelling. This can not only help you know your location and help you identify your destination, it can also give you that reassurance that you are in the place that you need to be and travelling in the right direction. Some strategies include:

- **Technology** – This will be covered in greater detail in Section 3, but technology is one way of identifying your location. There are many navigation apps which can give you information about your surroundings and points of interest along your journey.
- **Audible announcements** – If you are travelling on public transport that utilises built-in audible announcements, these can give you an indication of the current stop, the next stop and its final destination.
- **Asking the driver or fellow passengers** – If you are unsure of your destination and don't have access to technology, or poor service, asking the driver or fellow passengers can be another way of obtaining location information. If you are travelling by bus, another solution is to ask the driver for the bus number as you board, so that you can ensure that you are getting on the bus you need. You can also ask the driver to let you know when you are at your destination stop.
- **Clues** – There may be clues in your journey which can be of help. These may include particular sounds, smells or movements such as turning a sharp corner.
- **Alarm** – If you are on a long journey and have an idea of its duration, it may be wise to set an alarm; this could alert you prior to the time you should arrive.

## Investigate benefits

Your local council will be able to offer you a free concessionary travel pass to enable you to travel on public transport in your local area. If you are registered sight impaired, you will be entitled to a Concessionary pass which will enable you to travel for free during off-peak times (after 9:30am). Those registered severely sight impaired may be entitled to a Concession+ Pass which gives 24/7 free travel in your local area.

If you travel by train, the **Disabled Persons Railcard** entitles you to 1/3 off train tickets, as well as 1/3 off a train ticket for another person you are travelling with.

# • using technology

## Do your research

If you are new to using technology, research what is out there and which options would work best for you. We have lots of content in our Knowledge Village about using technology, and there are various other websites and platforms such as Facebook groups where you can enquire about different technology solutions.

## Navigation Apps

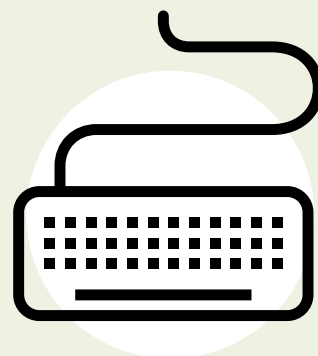
If you use a smartphone, navigation apps can give you information about your surroundings and can give turn-by-turn directions.

There are apps designed specifically for visually impaired people such as **Microsoft Soundscape** and **Lazarillo**, as well as mainstream apps including Apple Maps and Google Maps.

## Other Apps

Apps can also be used for reading, identifying objects and colours. These apps may prove useful when out and about for reading signs such as names of shops, or displays indoors, such as posters and names of rooms.

One app which we are huge fans of here at Henshaws is **Seeing AI**, a free app developed by Microsoft. Other apps which work similarly to Seeing AI include **Envision AI** and **Supersense**.



## Accessories

There are many technology accessories which may prove useful when out and about. These include:

- **Bone conduction headphones** – These are wireless headphones which connect to Bluetooth-enabled devices. These are open-ear headphones so that you can maintain privacy while still being able to hear the outside world. This is especially useful if you use your smartphone to navigate when out and about, as you will be able to clearly hear instructions while still being able to listen to sounds around you, including oncoming traffic. Watch our **video** about bone conduction headphones to learn more.
- **Sunu band** – This is a device which you wear on your wrist, which uses haptic feedback to indicate obstacles above you. The stronger the haptic feedback, the closer you are to the obstacle. You can learn more about the Sunu band in our **blog** and **video**.
- **Magnifier** – For people with some residual vision, a portable magnifier will enable you to enlarge text around you such as numbers on public transport, signs and indoor displays. There are different styles of magnifiers, with different capabilities, so try to arrange demonstrations of different ones so you can work out which one works best for you and your needs. Learn more in our **magnification video**.

## Compliment, not replacement

While technology is evolving and opening up possibilities for visually impaired people, it is important to remember that it is a compliment to a traditional mobility aid, not a replacement. It is important to still have good orientation and mobility skills, as you cannot solely rely on technology to give you 100% accurate information, and most technological items are battery-powered so you need to have a back-up plan if your technology runs out of power or stops working without warning.





# • skills for sighted people

## Sighted Guide

Sighted Guide is a technique for guiding a visually impaired person from A to B safely. Some visually impaired people prefer to use sighted guide in unfamiliar environments, or in situations where they need to find something specific, such as a particular seat on a train or seat in an entertainment venue.

There are certain methods that are recommended in order to do sighted guide safely:

- Before guiding the visually impaired person, let them know of your presence and ask them which side they would like them on before guiding them. It is also equally important to inform the visually impaired person that you are walking away, once you have finished guiding them.
- To guide, the person being guided should hold onto your elbow, with you being one step in front. To guide through a narrow space, put the arm you are guiding with behind your back; the person you are guiding should move their hand so it is touching your wrist. This could be indicated by saying, “it’s a narrow space, tuck in.”
- If guiding somebody to a chair, place your hand on the back of the seat. The person you are guiding can then locate the chair by following down to your wrist. Let the person locate the seat of the chair, to check it isn’t folded up.
- There are many techniques for sight guiding, a rehabilitation officer from the local authority sensory team, or a local sight loss charity should be able to offer comprehensive training. You can also watch our **sighted guide video** to watch it in action.

## Just Ask Don’t Grab

If you want to offer assistance to a visually impaired person, ask them if they would like assistance first. Providing assistance without consent can be distressing, and could make them feel more disorientated than before the assistance was given.

It is also important to be respectful of peoples’ personal space and independence.



### **Ask what support is needed**

If a visually impaired person accepts your offer of assistance, allow them to explain what support they would like – don't assume, as every visually impaired person is unique and has individual needs.

Some visually impaired people may want sighted guide, while others may want to follow your voice. Some visually impaired people may want obstacles pointing out, while others may want to detect obstacles themselves using their cane or guide dog.

Similarly, if guiding between storeys in a building, ask how they would like to get there. Some people may prefer to use the lift, while others may want to use the stairs or escalator.

### **Accessible Information**

Ensure information is accessible, for example public transport timetables, websites with contact information and anything else that may help a visually impaired person plan their journey and travel safely.

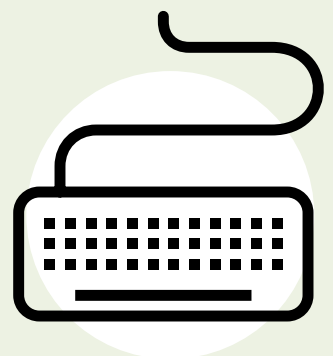
If you display information in a building such as a venue or office block, ensure that this information is available in alternative formats such as Braille, large print and online.

### **Safe spaces**

Ensure spaces are clutter-free making it safer and smoother for visually impaired people, and anybody else, to navigate. Also ensure good lighting levels and clear signage.

If possible, inform people if changes to lay-out have been made so that people can plan ahead and seek an alternative route if necessary.

Bumping into an unexpected hazard or obstacle can be disorientating, and it can be distressing if a route has been completely cordoned off or altered without warning in a way that is inaccessible.



# • get in touch with henshaws

If you would like to contact us, you can call us on **0300 222 5555** or by emailing **info@henshaws.org.uk**.

You can also get in touch with us through social media, and follow us to keep up with our latest news and content:

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/Henshaws/>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/Henshaws>

**Instagram:** [https://www.instagram.com/henshaws\\_uk/](https://www.instagram.com/henshaws_uk/)

We also have our **Knowledge Village**, our very own online resource providing tips, tricks and tech for people living with sight loss – this includes the mobility content we have linked to throughout this eBook. We have blogs, videos and eBooks discussing everything from apps and products to our Life Hacks.

You can keep up-to-date with our Knowledge Village content by **signing up** to our mailing list.

