

What to Do when You Meet a Sighted Person

People who use their eyes to acquire information about the world are called sighted people or "people who are sighted." Legal "sight" means [any visual acuity greater than 20/200](#) in the better eye without correction or an angle of vision wider than 20 degrees. Sighted people enjoy rich, full, lives, as they work, play, and raise families. They run businesses, hold public offices, and teach your children.

Sighted people cannot function well in low lighting conditions and are usually helpless in total darkness. Their homes are usually brightly lit at great expense, as are businesses that cater to the sighted consumer.

How Can I Best Communicate with Sighted People?

Sighted people are accustomed to viewing the world in visual terms. This means that in many situations, they will not be able to communicate orally and may resort to pointing or other gesturing. They may also use subtle facial expressions to convey feelings in social situations. Calmly alert the sighted person to his or her surroundings by speaking slowly, in a normal tone of voice. There is no need to raise your voice when addressing a sighted person.

How Do Sighted People Get Around?

People who are sighted may walk or ride public transportation, but most choose to travel long distances by [operating their own motor vehicles](#), usually one passenger to a car. They have gone through many hours of extensive training to learn the rules of the road in order to further their independence. Once that road to freedom has been mastered, sighted people earn a legal classification and a driver's license, which allows them to operate a private vehicle relatively safely and independently.

How Can I Assist a Sighted Person?

At times, sighted people may need help finding things, especially when operating a motor vehicle. Your advance knowledge of routes and landmarks, particularly bumps in the road, turns, and traffic lights, will assist the "driver" in finding the way quickly and easily. Your knowledge of building layouts can also assist the sighted person in navigating complex shopping malls and offices. Sighted people tend to be very proud and will not ask directly for assistance. Be gentle, yet firm.

How Do Sighted People Read?

[Sighted people read](#) via a system called "print." Print is a series of images drawn in a two-dimensional plane. Because the person who is sighted relies exclusively on visual information, his or her attention span tends to fade quickly when reading long texts. People who are sighted generally have a poorly developed sense of touch. [Braille](#) is completely foreign to the sighted person and he or she will take longer to learn the code and be severely limited by his or her existing visual senses.

How Do Sighted People Use Computers?

[Computer information](#) is presented to sighted people in a "Graphical User Interface" or GUI. Sighted people often suffer from hand-eye coordination problems. To accommodate this difficulty, people who are sighted use a "mouse," a handy device that slides along the desk top to save confusing keystrokes. With one button, the sighted person can move around his or her computer screen quickly and easily.

People who are sighted are not accustomed to synthetic speech and may have great difficulty understanding even the clearest synthesizer. Be patient and be prepared to explain many times how *your* computer equipment works.

How Can I Support a Sighted Person?

People who are sighted do not want your charity. They want to live, work and play alongside you on an equal basis. The best thing you can do to support sighted people in your community is to open yourself to their world. These citizens are vital contributing members of the community, real people with thoughts and feelings, hopes and dreams, and a story to tell. Take a sighted person to lunch today.

Entitled *What To Do when You Meet a Sighted Person*, it is usually attributed to "Author Unknown." I did a bit of research, however, and have traced its probable origin to author Kent Ireton in the 1999 [Minnesota Bulletin](#), a quarterly publication of the [National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota](#). (If I am incorrect about this citation, please let me know!)