



Iowa Department for the Blind

I have no financial relationships to disclose.

Thought Experiment:

What do you think the hardest thing about being blind would be?

Common Responses

- Not being able to drive.
- Not being able to see beautiful things like sunsets and rainbows.
- Not being able to read print books, letters, documents, etc.
- Dealing with inaccessible websites, software, or apps.

Actual Answer

The hardest part of being blind is dealing with the misconceptions and false beliefs that our society holds about the capabilities of blind people. Since we are part of society, we need to alter our own misconceptions and false beliefs as well as deal with the consequences of the misconceptions and false beliefs held by those around us.

The Medical View Of Blind People

“Visual impairment is a national and global health concern that has a negative impact on physical and mental health. Visually impaired individuals are at particularly high risk for chronic health conditions, accidents, social withdrawal, depression, and mortality. “

— American Academy of Ophthalmology

“I felt insulted and misunderstood as a human being. I was angry to the point of tears, but I knew that many medical professionals tend to look at us as broken machines that are in need of fixing, instead of valuable, intelligent human beings.”

— blind patient/caregiver

Bad Experiences Dealing With Medical Professionals

- “The doctor assumed that I should just have a hysterectomy because I was blind and not going to have children.”
- “The nurse then takes my medical history- never asks if I have been pregnant/given birth before, or if I could currently be pregnant. She seems very surprised when I mention that I have had a baby, and she moves on .“
- She whispers to the doctor: “just so you are aware” and then she not-so-discretely gestures at me with the paperwork. I assume this is to gesture in some way that I am blind.
- “For years, my sisters, parents, and I went to a family doctor and I was always frustrated because I felt like he would talk around me to someone else, not to me. I always thought that he did not think I could understand much what he was saying because of my blindness”
- “When you ask for assistance filling out forms, they do it in the waiting room, loudly so the rest of the patients and staff get to hear your medical history. I do not object though, because this is better than having them refuse to fill out the forms.
- “Clearly frustrated, the doctor slid up to the point that our knees were touching. Apparently he thought if he got closer, I would be able to see better. Without explanation, the doctor grabbed my arms and moved them into place and rotated my wrists.”
- “After my blind friend's heart attack, the doctor strongly believed that she couldn't take care of herself and recommended she be put in a care facility. She had to PROVE to the doctor that she could do what was required or he would call some higher power to force her into a care facility. She point blank asked the doctor if she were sighted would she have to prove her competence.”
- “Fortunately I am great at laughing things off but some of my friends gain higher levels of anxiety with the thought of going to the doctor's office and start avoiding going.”

Good Experiences Dealing With Medical Professionals

- When our first son was born, he had to spend six weeks in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). My wife and I spent every available hour we could up at the NICU taking care of him, feeding him, bathing him, changing his diapers independently. The NICU nurses were amazing and if they had a question about blindness, they'd ask, we'd answer, and they accepted.
- My husband is blind too. He went with our 18 year old to explore an ankle surgery for him. This doctor did something no other doctor had done before. He pulled out a skeletal model of a foot and ankle, took Tom's hand and showed him, non-visually, what they were planning to do and explained everything. In a later visit, the doctor did the same thing for Tom's shoulder injury.
- I had a good doctor who saw me with all my medical conditions and being blind and we spoke on having kids and with no hesitation she started me on pre-natals.

What NOT To Do

- Don't grab, push or pull. Ask if we would like an arm and do not be offended if we decline.
- Don't generalize. Just because you have one blind patient who was a real jerk or one blind person who was so "amazing", don't assume all blind people are jerks or amazing.
- Don't presume a blind patient needs a sighted helper. If their spouse or family member happens to not be blind, don't presume that this person is their seeing eye person.
- Don't treat blind spouses or caretakers any differently than you would any other family support.
- Don't presume that a blind person has no money, job, kids, modesty, intelligence, skills, or dreams.

What To Do

- Use accessible electronic forms, preferably ones that can be filled out on the patient's own phone or computer.
- If you don't have accessible forms, find the most private place to help them fill out the forms.
- Verbalize where you will be touching the patient and why you are doing it.
- Presume that your blind patient has the skills they need to be independent. If you see evidence to the contrary, refer them to the Iowa Department for the Blind so they can become independent.
- It's OK to be curious. Generally speaking, most blind folks are happy to show you how they use their phone or cane or braille device, but please understand in a higher-stress situation, like going into surgery, we might not have the energy.
- Remember that blind people are people. Our blindness is just one fact about us and it is never the most interesting fact about anyone.

What is the Iowa Department for the Blind

- We help blind Iowans gain the skills, self-confidence, and positive attitude they need to gain employment and advance in their careers.
- We help employers find the highly qualified and motivated employees they are looking for and help them to break down their misconceptions about hiring blind people.
- We provide tools and training to older individuals who are losing their vision to allow them to continue to live independently in their homes and communities.
- We provide braille, audio, and large print educational materials to K-12 students across the state and library books and magazines to Iowans of all ages.

Thought Experiment:

What do you think are the 3 factors which most often correlate to employment success for blind people?

The Three Factors for Employment Success

1. Educational attainment
2. Frequent use of braille
3. Membership in a blindness advocacy organization such as the National Federation of the Blind or American Council of the Blind

from “Rehabilitation and Employment Outcomes for Adults Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired: An Updated Report”

By Edward C. Bell, Ph.D., and Arielle M. Silverman, Ph.D.

<https://www.nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/jbir/jbir18/jbir080101.html>

Rehabilitation Counseling

- Providing counseling and guidance to help clients work through fears and frustrations regarding their vision loss.
- Helping clients find blind people who work in the fields they are interested in working in.
- Encouraging the development of peer supports.
- Arranging for the provision of disability related skills training.
- Assisting with labor market research, researching post-secondary education, work-based learning, and other career exploration activities.
- Facilitating job shadows, mock interviews, resume reviews and other job readiness and job search activities.

Orientation Center Training

- Comprehensive adjustment to blindness training.
- Intensive, deliberate practice in non-visual skills using structured discovery methodology.
- Building self-confidence and a positive attitude toward blindness.
- Classes include: braille, assistive technology, cane travel, home management, life skills, careers, industrial arts.

VR Teaching & Rehabilitation Technology

- Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers (VRTs) work with clients in their communities, schools, homes, and worksites teaching braille, assistive technology, home and personal management, and cane travel.
- Rehabilitation Technology Specialists (RTSs) teach more advanced assistive technology and work with employers to make their computer and information systems accessible for blind employees.
- VR teams hold community based trainings throughout the state and host week long intensive trainings three times a year for VR clients.

Independent Living Program

- Independent Living Rehabilitation Teachers (ILRTs) travel the state to serve individuals who have experienced severe vision loss and are not interested in returning to work.
- IDB provides IL services to individuals in their homes and through small group trainings at IDB and throughout the state.
- Teachers work with clients on marking appliances, cooking, cleaning, cane travel, braille, self-advocacy, obtaining peer supports, using cell phones and basic computer usage, signing up for library and reading services,
- IDB provides non-visual assistive devices including talking and braille watches, talking clocks, bump dots, letter and check writing guides, long white canes, braille textbooks and writing materials, and other sustainable equipment to clients as part of their training.

The Value of Independent Living Services

- Average total case cost per client: \$1,501.
- Cost for one month of nursing home care in Iowa: \$5,833.

Library Services

- Circulates books and magazines , braille, large print, and other alternative formats to those who cannot read standard print
- Provides access to local and national newspapers and magazines through NFB Newslines and Iowa Reading Information Services
- Provides educational materials in alternative formats to blind and low vision pre-K12 and college students.
- Encourages literacy and STEM engagement through Youth Library activities

Other IDB Programs & Services

- The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) offers the opportunity for blind individuals to own and operate their own vending business. IDB has priority to set up locations in state, federal, county, and city office buildings and rest areas. IDB provides the locations and equipment. The operators sell food and beverages and provide customer service.
- The Gifts & Bequests Fund offers grants and no interest loans to help blind Iowans purchase assistive technology, attend trainings and conventions, and meet other specific needs. More information can be found at: <https://blind.iowa.gov/gifts-bequests-fund-guidelines>

For More Information

- Our Website: <https://blind.iowa.gov>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IowaBlind>
- YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/IDBonline>
- Sign up for our Newsletters:
https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/IACIO/subscriber/new?gsp=IACIO_30

Questions?



Thank You!