**10 things to know about Deafblindness**:

**1) Please do not question our ability to see or hear**.

I label myself as a Deafblind person, yet I wear glasses, with limited correction, and use a white cane. I also have a Cochlear Implant and can identify environmental sounds, but cannot understand speech without close lipreading. Others may speak very well and can carry a conversation on a cell phone, but have trouble in noisy areas or with strangers as their voices are not familiar.

**2) If you’re in our space please do not move things around**.

We need things exactly where we’ve placed them so we can quickly find them again. There’s no “scanning” visually for it, so if something’s moved, it takes us a long time to find it by touch. If you do move something, tell us where you’ve put it.

**3) To get our attention, place your hand on our arm or wrist**.

Waving in front of our faces may not work, or may startle us. Tapping our shoulder is alright but it may take longer for us to find you as we still need to find where you are. Having your hand on our wrist enables us to “track” you by following your arm back up to your face.

**4) Please don’t touch or grab our cane, guide dog, or mobility aid**.

We’re dependent on this tool to get around independently. If you’re walking with us, please don’t grab the cane to avoid hitting an obstacle– that’s the cane’s job! Do not stop or push us out of the way of something. It may look like we’re going to hit a wall, but maybe we needed to find the wall, as it’s a landmark to help us get our bearings. And a guide dog in harness is always working. Distracting them by talking or petting can be dangerous for the handler, as the dog might miss an important cue.

**5) We may move around to see or hear you better.**

Sometimes the lighting or noise is bothering us so we may switch places or move to a different place. We might shift over a bit to see or hear better, like avoiding glare from a light. Please don’t copy our actions and shift over yourself. It then becomes an awkward dance.

**6) Our hands are our eyes**.

Please let us “explore” our surroundings by touch. If we’re sitting at a table, we might like to know what’s on it by feeling around. Don’t swat our hands away or start moving things out of our reach. Also, don’t ask if I want to feel your face. It’s awkward. We can feel more character out of a handshake than feeling you up, heh.

**7) Please ask us if we need assistance**.

Don’t be upset if we refuse. We are pretty capable of being independent on our own. If we do need assistance, let us take your elbow or shoulder for guidance. That way we’re a step behind and can feel where you’re going, and if you’re going to go up or down, etc. Do not grab us, tow us, or force us to walk in front of you like a human shield. Do not insist that you need to help us and guide us to places unknown. If it’s an emergency, draw a large “X” on the person’s back (Shoulder to waist), this signals to the deafblind person that it’s an emergency.

**8) It takes us longer to do things**.

Let us do things at our pace and by our methods. Don’t get impatient and grab things from us to do it for us quickly, especially if it’s personal stuff like our wallets. It’s much more helpful to aid us in being independent than taking it from us and doing it on your schedule. For example, drive us to the bank to do our banking instead of saying “I’ll get the cash and give it to you later when I go do errands”.

**9) Don’t pity or patronize us.**

We are human beings doing our best to get by in this world, just like you. We may be short a few senses, but we’re not short a brain. Treat us with dignity and ask us what you can do to help; don’t assume we can’t do something.

**10) Don’t tell us that we’re “inspiring” or “brave”.**

That’s annoying and aggravating to us. Would you feel inspired by some average Joe pouring his own cup of coffee? Because that’s all we’re simply doing: everyday average things. Be inspired by our accomplishments, not our daily lives. Read about people like Haben Girma, a deafblind lawyer; or Dr. Robert Smithdas, who’s the first deafblind in the U.S. to earn a Master’s degree as well as being an accomplished poet, writer and teacher.