

VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN ROCK CLIMBING AND BOULDERING

A guide for coaches, instructors and volunteers

As a coach, instructor or volunteer there are some simple things you can do to make sure that someone with a visual impairment has the best possible experience

Considerations

- Be clear on where you will meet the person; be there ready to show them around so they can become familiar with the facility.
- Introduce yourself by name; just saying hello isn't always enough to get someone's attention, you should use the person's name, and don't assume someone will recognise you by voice after only a few meetings.
- Talk to the participants prior to the session and ask questions to understand individual needs, visual impairment will affect individual differently.
 - How much can the person see?
 - How does light affect the person vision?
 - Have they had sight previously? This may affect their understanding of the sport, task or venue.
 - Will they be bringing along someone to support them in the session.
- Establish if there is a preferred position for you to stand to deliver instructions and information, make the most of useable sight.
- Be conscious of colour clash, in what you're wearing and holds on the wall.
- Describe the activity, where you will stand, how a climber can come down from the wall. Allow time for touch instead of continued verbal description. Practise at a low level or offer side support to build confidence.
- Climbers may not know the difficulty of the climb, talk through the climb beforehand to allow the climber to visualize the route.
- Ensure music levels aren't too high, you want to be able hear each other
- Understand the participant's expectations from the session, taking into consideration that these may differ from other sessions you've delivered.



Guiding

Prior to the session allow time for the participant to walk around the venue, or explain to them the layout, show them the toilets, the cafe.

Top tips for guiding someone with a visual impairment

- Introduce yourself, communicate clearly, offer help and listen to their response.
- Ask where and how they would like to be guided. Allow them to take your arm, rather than you holding or grabbing theirs.
- Communicate and describe the surroundings and what is ahead ie; 'small step up' 'wall on the left hand side'. Describe any changes in terrain
- Watch out for and advise participants on objects such as chalk bags on the floor, or lower ceiling/wall heights.
- Don't walk away without saying you are leaving.

If you get the opportunity visit [RNIB - Guiding a blind or partially sighted person](#) and [RNIB - How to guide people with sight problems](#)

Equipment

Introduce the different holds, encourage participants to touch and feel to understand the differences. Tell them whether it's a jug, sloper or crimp etc, so that when you are communicating on the wall they will know what type of hold to expect.

Spend the time to show and explain the belay system to a climber, allow climbers to feel how to tie knots, how to fit the harness so they are able to repeat and become competent.

Sighted Assistants

Some climbers with a visual impairment may require sighted assistants on the floor who can describe the type and location of their next hold, by using terms such as 'by your left knee', or 'right hand at 9 o'clock'.

Sighted assistants who are able to, may side support some climbers, this can be good for confidence amongst new climbers, and for those who may need physical support to locate their next hold.

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