

Everybody welcome!

Guiding and Scouting in VCP: Inclusion in practice



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1 Preface

Dear guides and scouts, inclusion and special needs is a field too complex to cover in this little booklet. It is but an attempt to give you some guidance on understanding this topic, we do not seek perfection. If you have any ideas, comments or requests, please feel free to contact us, the project group "Guiding and Scouting – all inclusive": fg.pma@vcp.de

Our purpose

Seamless scouting and guiding, such was the aim when our project group – then called "Guiding and Scouting against all odds" – was founded back in 1981. The name has changed, and yet our purpose remains: Empowering people for guiding and scouting, making it accessible for everyone, no matter if they have special needs or not.

We are proud to say that in the meantime, many groups of people with special needs have been founded whose members share a life with and without special needs, enjoy their time together, go camping and hiking, creating our association's life together. And indeed, we can say that for many VCP groups, this is perfectly normal.

Such groups have achieved what our society's still lacking: inclusion. The point is to empower every individual to claim its rights and to provide access to institutions and services. Implementing inclusion into political and social schemes has become the United Nations' primary directive as of 2008, when the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities had been agreed upon. In consequence, the Federal Government of Germany has begun to initiate schemes to achieve the aim, and

hence the word of inclusion is on the streets. Especially in schools steps have been taken towards inclusion and towards providing access to education for everyone.

In spite of all the changes, young people with disabilities are often structurally separated from those without. Often, they hardly mingle. How much do we actually know of each other?

With this booklet, we invite you to reduce the boundaries between people with and without disabilities. We, the guides and scouts, believe that by meeting and sharing lives, as people with and without disabilities, we experience a real chance for a change. We accept this as a challenge.

Joining hands, it is something that can become real in our groups.

This booklet contains basic information about handicaps and provides you with ideas on how to implement this topic in your guide and scout meetings. Core elements of our proposals are scripts for your group meetings in which the young people may experience the perspective of people with special needs. This will help prepare the children and young people to approach those children and young people with disabilities and to invite them to join the VCP.

We hope that this booklet can help you to implement inclusion into your activities.

Your project group "Guiding and Scouting – all inclusive"



2 Defining "handicap"

At a glance

Most likely, you have already met people with walking aids, wheelchairs, arms in a bandage or a bound head. Or maybe someone in your class had broken an arm or a leg. Are these people disabled?

How can we determine whether someone is disabled or not?

Watch out for the following signs: If someone's unable to move, learn or to behave like most people of the same age, if a handicap has been existing for at least six months or longer – or even permanently, we can assume that this person is disabled.

German Federal law defines human beings as disabled when "bodily functions, mental skills or psychic health are deferring from the typical condition of that age group for most likely more than six months."

Persons affected, lobbyists and many institutions often have a different definition of being "disabled", which is usually due to their differing points of view or other focus.

Recommendation for a group meeting

Task for each group member: define the term "disabled" or "handicap". Share your results and create a new definition of these terms together. Maybe you should also research on the internet further descriptions of "handicap".

Not quite what is seems

There are more than 1,000 congenital malformations and disorders that may result in a handicap. Also, accidents, intoxications and mental shocks can cause a disability.

A handicap may occur at lighter or heavier degrees. In consequence, some people may hardly be affected by their handicap whereas others cause severe difficulties in many aspects of life.

Because of the various types of handicaps, disabilities are grouped in patterns that help structuring and evaluating.

As a rule, three types of handicaps can be distinguished:

Bodily handicaps

The loss of a leg, for example, or reduced sensual reception (the sense of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling etc.)

If walking is inhibited, the persons affected can make use of a walking aid or a wheelchair. Sometimes the articulation of speech is causing difficulties due to muscular issues.

Mental handicaps

In this case, cerebral functions are limited or in disorder, as well as memory and imagination may be perturbed. Speech and behavior usually are also affected by mental

disorders, which tend to be very diverse. Every affected individual has distinctive skills as well as personal restrictions. A mental handicap commonly known is the Down Syndrome.

Psychic handicaps

are invisible from the outside, as the perception and interpretation of information and emotions are affected. This has an impact on the affected persons' patterns of feeling, thinking and behavior. For example, schizophrenia, depressions and various phobias are psychic handicaps.

Some statistics

How many disabled people are there in Germany?

According to the German Federal Statistical Office, there were 8.7 million people with an officially recognized handicap living in Germany in 2012, of which 7.1 million were regarded as severely handicapped.

Relative to the overall population in the country, this is 10 percent of the population, i.e. **one out of ten Germans is disabled**.

Disabilities are more likely to occur at a higher age than among younger people. The Federal Statistical Office states that:

- 29 percent, i.e. more than a quarter of the severely handicapped people are 75 years or older,
- 46 percent, about half of the total amount of handicapped people, belong to the age group between 55 and 75 years of age,
- 23 percent, i. e. a quarter is found between 19 and 54 years of age,
- and only 2 percent are minors (under 18).

Causes for handicaps

- Only 4 percent of all disabilities are hereditary.
- In 82 percent of all cases, a disease could be held responsible.
- 2 percent were caused by an accident or a work-related disease.
- The rest (roughly 10 percent) were caused by other factors.

Some suggestions for group meetings

Take two important facts from the above statistics and let the scouts and guides guess the answers. Example:

What do you think? How many percent (or how many people out of a hundred) in Germany are disabled?

Collect the results. After revealing the solution (10 percent or one out of ten), try to visualize these figures. You can count your group, telling every tenth member that they are disabled according to the statistics. Then you can relate these figures to your home town. For example, Karlsruhe has about 300,000 inhabitants, of which 10 percent, thus 30,000, are disabled. In this way, statistical figures become plausible to the young people.

What do you think? Out of 100 disabled people, how many have been disabled congenitally?

The mother may have had an accident during her pregnancy or suffered from an intoxication or disease, the child started breathing too late after birth, thus causing damage to the brain by insufficient oxygen or the disorder is hereditary.

The solution, a mere 4 percent, will be surprising, and the converse argument that 96 percent of all handicaps have been obtained in life, may be used to trigger a discussion in the group. Allow time.

3 On the road to a new experience

Get in your chairs, set, go!

Suggestions for guide and scout meetings

The aim of this guide and scout meeting is getting to know obstacles and problems of wheelchair users' everyday life that they have to face regularly.

Preparation

- Where can I obtain wheelchairs for the experiment?
- Contact your local nursing services, medical and orthopedic suppliers etc.
- It may be useful to get a wheelchair user to support your experiments.

Course of actions

Introduction at your scout hut:

- How to handle a wheelchair (i. e. foldables/regulars, movable wheelchair parts, lock rings, brakes etc.);
- How to move around in a wheelchair (try this out: explore the danger of tilting backwards!);
- How to surmount obstacles like sills, kerbstones and stairways etc.

After a thorough introduction in the handling of wheelchairs you can go outside exploring the environment in a wheelchair.

Before this:

- check if you have enough wheelchairs,
- assign a fitting wheelchair to every group respectively every participant,
- estimate if the the wheelchair riders have to be replaced on the way. If so, where and how?

Possible tasks for a wheelchair tour:

- visit toilets in a café or restaurant
- look for a public toilet with wheelchair access
- check the changing rooms in a local clothes shop
- try on shoes in a shoe shop
- obtain money at a cash machine
- ask for cultural events at the tourist information
- inspect the accessibility in the means of public transport (bus, tram)
- at the station, ask for train connections with wheelchair access

In order to have an experience as thorough as possible, every group member should stay in the wheelchair as long as possible.

Caution: Do not confuse self-awareness with dramatics.

Be sure to instruct your group members to be cautious with their behaviour. To show off sitting in a wheelchair, for example *getting up yelling "I'm cured"* is not funny.

Documentation and evaluation

- How does my new experience affect me?
- Does that change my points of view?
- What if...?

Try to let every wheelchair group take a mobile phone or digital camera to conserve interesting situations in a picture. The pictures can be printed and used for later evaluation. In order to evaluate your own project, you can assemble a collage. This could include the pictures of your wheelchair tour.

3 On the road to a new experience



Exploring various kinds of surfaces.



Scaling steps.

The main aspect of your tour is not to evaluate your home town's wheelchair accessibility, but to share your experience.

After making your experience with a wheelchair:

A suggestion for evaluation/discussion group

Imagine the following situation: A member of your guide and scout group had a severe accident and due to paralyzed legs will be permanently chair bound. Still,

your fellow member wants to take part in your group's activities.

Which problems may occur:

- for your fellow member in your group activities (scout hut, amenities, cooking, hiking and camping)?
- for the other group members?
- How can you tackle these problems?
- Guess which problems are the most severe for disabled people?

4 How to handle being without hands

Suggestions for your scout meetings

Aims

Try to discover and experience the restrictions imposed on you with handicapped arms and legs.

Preparations

Gather diverse material to deepen your understanding of a handicap. Use your imagination to create artificial handicap "devices" during your scout meetings. I. e.

- cardboard tubes, sticks or bandages around your arms or legs to stiffen them
- neckerchiefs or belts to fixate your arms to the body
- thick gloves (such as to bbq or touch hot food) or mittens to reduce tactile sensitivity
- fingered gloves stiffened with glue

Introduction

After the fake handicaps have been prepared, label them with a number. The group members roll a dice to choose one of the handicaps to perform the experiment with. By rolling a dice, we ensure that the handicaps are distributed randomly.

Please help each other with "applying" the handicaps. Do not squeeze body parts.

Course of actions

- Start moving to get to know the handicaps.
- Look at each other's *handicaps* consciously and start talking.
- Try to carry out given tasks alone or in groups.

Possible tasks:

- Cutting fruits, preparing food;
- filling in a glas of water;

- putting on some trousers/a jacket, open or close a zip-fly;
- putting on shoes, binding laces;
- using a mobile phone;
- opening or closing a door lock;
- handing yourself or others food;
- painting a picture;
- measuring the size of a room;
- carrying out manual work such as sawing, hammering, cutting out figures with scissors etc.

At the end:

- share your experiences, emotions and feelings with the others
- How did you feel having a *handicap*?
- What was surprising and new to you?
- Can I cope with such a handicap permanently?
- What would change in my everyday life?
- Does this experience change my point of view?
- What if...?

Assemble a collage displaying your shared experiences.



5 Aural optics

Aims

Guides and scouts learn something about the life of deaf people.

Deafness or a impaired hearing is an invisible handicap. Blind people wear glasses or a white cane, people with walking disabilities use walking aids or wheelchairs. Sometimes, you can even notice people's mental disabilities.

The difference between deafness and impaired hearing is the use of language. The term *impaired hearing* covers the whole range of hearing disorders from light symptoms, hearing loss due to age to complete deafness and usually used for people using sign language.

As a rule, when people are communicating in sign language or when sign language is the exclusive form of communication, people refer to themselves as deaf. Also, people with residual hearing also consider themselves as *deaf*, even think of sign-language as *their language*.

The term *deaf-mute* is hardly used anymore, as deaf people are not automatically mute. More then often, there are deaf people that can actually utter intelligible sounds, strange though they may seem to our ears. Also people with impaired hearing can speak. And last but not least not every mute person is deaf.

People with early-acquired hearing impairments who received education in special facilities, usually use the finger alphabet and the sign-language for communication. People with presbycusis or those who acquired

their hearing impairment later in life, usually have the things said by others written down, if they lack understanding.

By the way, deaf people call the form of communication among each other *shop-talk*.

Suggestions for your guide and scout meetings

Preparation

- get yourself hearing protection or ear plugs
- make copies of the finger alphabet
- find books and posters in sign-language (libraries, on the net, support groups)

Introduction

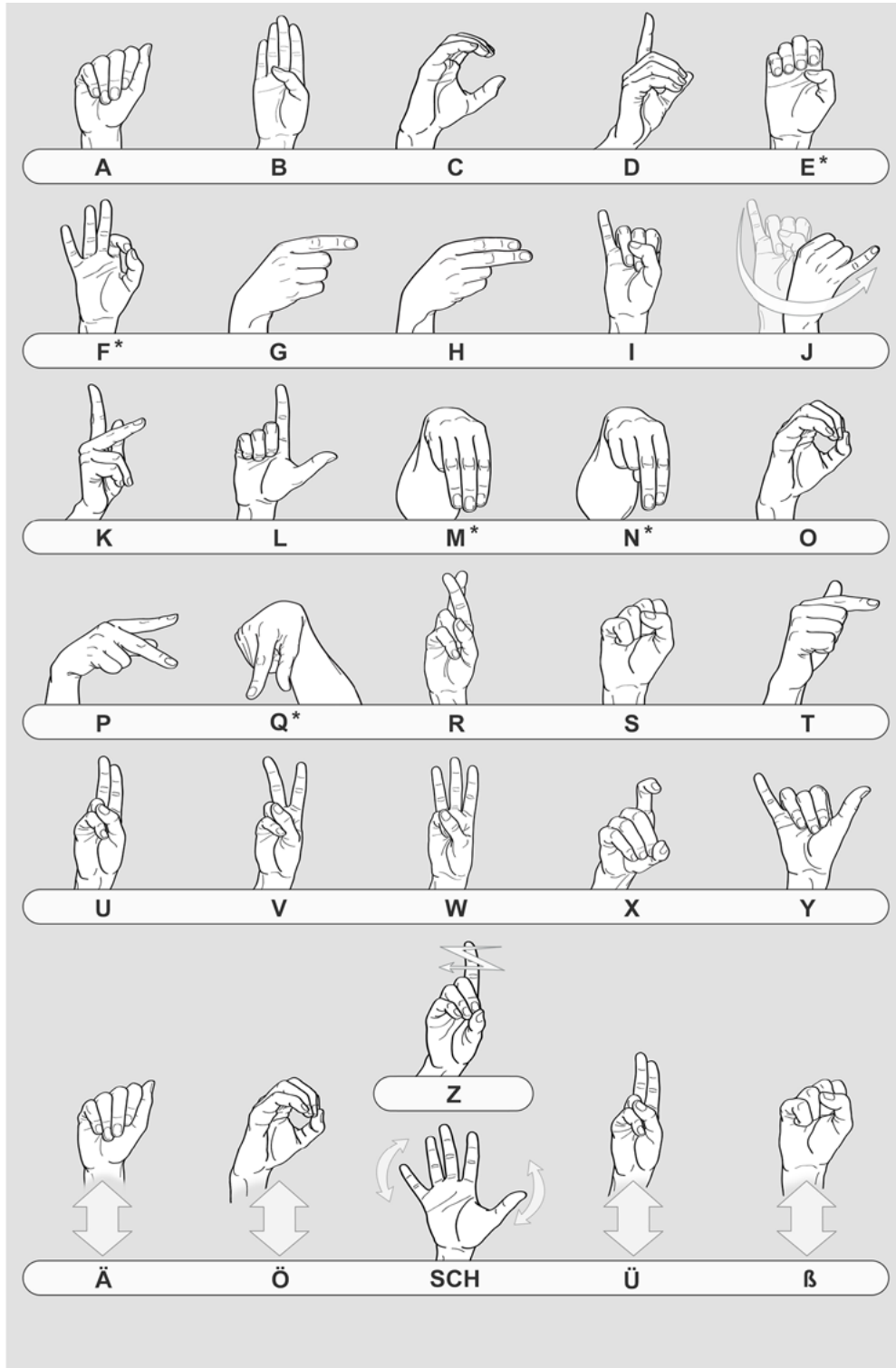
- Take a seat inside or outside (if the weather is suitable), close your eyes and focus on your sense of hearing. Which sounds can you hear?
- Two or three minutes later, get yourself hearing protection or ear plugs and listen again. What has changed? Does it "feel" different to hear less?
- Match up in pairs. Walk about your home town, one of you with hearing protection applied, the other without. How does the "deaf" person experience the walkabout?

Caution: Do not let anyone deaf walk in heavy traffic alone. We, being able to hear, trust our sense of hearing so much that walking about with deafened ears can become very dangerous!

At the end of the experiment, share your experiences in a group.

The German finger alphabet

From the spectator's view



The according gestures may differ in other languages.

Lord's Prayer in sign language



Our



Father



in heaven,



hallowed



be your



name.



Your



kingdom



come,



your



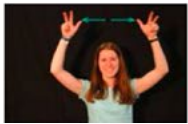
will



be done,



on Earth



as in



heaven.



Our



daily



bread



give



us



today



and forgive



us our



sins



as



we



forgive

those who
sin against

us.



And lead



us



not into



temptation,



but deliver



us from



evil.



Yours is



the kingdom



and the power



and the glory



forever.



AMEN.

This edition of the Lord's Prayer in sign language consists of a literal transcription from the German translation using the German sign language. The according gestures may differ in other languages.

JUGEND
CAMP//10*
der Evangelischen
Jugend im Rheinland



Enjoying a campfire together.

The finger alphabet

The finger alphabet is used for spelling names or if a term cannot be rendered in sign-language. In the German-speaking region, there is a commonly accepted alphabet whose letters use only one hand.

Using the finger alphabet is like writing. Try and *write* your name with your hand using the finger alphabet.

You can use it in a group or in a camp to talk without others understanding you. But beware: If the others know the alphabet as well, they can easily “eavesdrop” on your conversation.

Sign-language

Unlike common sense, there is nothing like a unified and generally accepted sign-language. There isn’t even a common language in Germany, even dialects are used. In the North of Germany, you swipe your flat hand upwards on your chest to sign the word for “Sunday”. This sign-languagese gesture originally denoted “bathing”, which was usually done on a Sunday. In the South, anyhow, the hands are folded to sign the word “Sunday”, because on Sunday, people go to church and pray. But how can “speakers” of sign-language from the North can understand each other? Well, they talk shop. And if the Southerner is surprised that Northerner had a bath two days ago, he’d just ask why.

Suggestions for your scout meetings

Let the guides and scouts sit comfortably. Let them stay calm, using but their hands and faces. Enact the following terms:

you – house
 tall – I
 eating – slender
 I feel warm – car
 bicycle – book
 sleeping – walking
 telephone (phone call) – baby
 elephant – drinking
 small – big
 I feel cold – good!

You see, sign language isn’t that difficult. Now you are able to use 20 signs that probably don’t correspond with the official sign language, but are commonly understood. Now add the numbers from 1 to 10. All-in, you know 30 words in sign-language. The sign-language gestures that you developed will probably be understood everywhere. Caution: Throughout the world, some gestures might be misunderstood.

Gesture guessing

Every guide and every scout makes up a simple word and looks up the corresponding gesture from a sign-language dictionary or on the internet. One after another, they sign their words. The others try to guess the correct meaning.

You may have noticed how important it is to use your facial expressions, for example with the phrases “I feel warm/cold”. While using sign-language, facial expressions are very important, just like the signing speed.

Like the voice can support the expression of a phrase, facial expressions can do the job. Give it a try: Support a simple phrase like “What a beautiful weather” or “I like candy” with varying facial expressions, resulting in changing meanings.

Also, try to just move your lips when pronouncing words, leaving the movements unvoiced. Using only facial expressions, does that make a difference? How does that change your facial expressions?

Hints on communicating

If your counterpart points out to you that you’re not being understood, you can stick to the following rules:

Talk slowly, using simple, clearly voiced words. Do not exaggerate or shout. It would change your lip movement, and the deaf person would not benefit from it. Some deaf people can read lip movements. So remove your chewing gum, and do not mumble. Pay attention to have the sun shine in your face, so that the deaf person has a well-illuminated face to look at and well-legible lip gestures.

Simple and short phrases are easier to understand. Do not use baby-talk.

German Sign-language (DGS)

DGS is the acronym for *Deutsche Gebärdensprache* (German Sign-Language). It commands a wealth of sign gestures and refined grammar. DGS allows deaf people to communicate among each other like the hearing can.

Sound-supporting Sign-language (LBG)

LBG means *Lautbegleitende Gebärdensprache* (Sound-supporting Sign-language). It is not a sign-language in its own right, but rather a method of making spoken language visible. Aside a spoken word, a gesture is signed that is closely related. LBG uses the vocabulary of DGS without using its grammar. LBG therefore is a lot easier to learn. Both languages leave aside secondary auxiliaries: “I hungry” instead of “I am hungry”, or “Where food?” instead of “Where can I eat?”. Use your lips to form regular phrases, but leave the words unvoiced. As a rule, the infinitive is used: The sign gesture for “(to) give” is the same as “I give, he/she/it gives” or “give us”.

Deictic sign gestures

“(To) give” is a sign gesture. “Give me [flat palm top-up, circular movement from the counterpart towards you] the butter” has a different direction of movement than “I give [flat palm top-up, circular movement towards the counterpart] you the butter.” One time the movement goes towards you, then it goes away from you. In this way, again some parts of the verbal syntax are elliptic (me, you). “(to) send a fax”, “(to) visit” and “(to) say” are other deictic sign gestures.

Sign-language choirs – singing without voice

Indeed there are sign-language choirs, that is groups of deaf people performing songs in sign-language.

Try yourself the song “Herr, gib uns deinen Frieden” (Grant us peace, Lord). Shoptalk it together rhythmically. Almost like dancing, increase the speed until you reach the regular song tempo.

Five words, four gestures:

“**Lord**”: put your right hand, three fingers spread out, indicating “three” (The Holy Trinity).

“**grant us/give us**”: flat palm top-up; draw a horizontal circle, yourself being in touch with the circular movement (deictic gesture).

“**your**”: flat palm top-up, pointing at your imaginary counterpart (do not use the index finger only, as this means “you”).

“**peace**”: Index or middle finger of both hands joined, move both hands apart in form of an arch in an outward direction.

If you shoptalk at regular singing speed, you might happen to skip the gesture “your”, resulting in the words “give us peace”. No problem, just take care that the choreography is fluent and looking good.

6 Seeing hands

In this guide and scout meeting, we will cover visual impairments and blindness.

Like hearing impairments, a visual impairment can be a lighter or more severe impairment or complete blindness. In Germany, there are 155,000 blind people. Some are blind by birth, some obtained their impairments in childhood or at adult age. 50 percent go blind due to age-related issues of the eye.

People that went blind at young age or at early adulthood usually develop a more refined sense of touch, hearing and smell. As the sense of seeing is dysfunctional, the other senses are noticeably better developed.

A blind person can, by hearing, judge the distance of another person talking. It is even possible to tell, if the person is looking at you while talking or not.

Moreover, blind people are much more attentive to smells, as this helps to find the right way. For example, a bakery smells somewhat different than a shoe shop.

Blind people can "see" with their hands. Pouring a glass, they put a finger inside to know when it's full. They also read with their hands: They use braille, little patterns of dots coined into a sheet of paper.

Braille

Louis Braille developed an alphabet that blind people could read in 1825. It consists of dots coined into paper. Every letter of the Latin alphabet has a specific pattern. The elevated dots are read from left to right. But when "writing", the letters are imprinted in the backward sense, thus mirrored.

Today, there are technical facilities, i.e. to work on the computer. Programmes "translate" the letters on the screen into a line of *braille* letters in a special reading device near the keyboard where blind people can read.

In the internet you can find various sites with downloadable samples of the braille alphabet. Also, you can try yourself to write the alphabet by sending each other messages in braille.

Suggestions for your group meetings

Preparation

Get yourself some goggles and apply some black color varnish onto the glasses (or use a black felt-tip marker instead). Or, to simulate a lack of definition, apply some translucent varnish. Or you can even make little holes in the blackened lenses to imitate an inhibited field of (tunnel) vision.

KIM games

Many blindfold games might already be known by KIM games (Boxes in which you put your hands and tell what you find in there only by touching items/sound memory). Try to explore your environment only by feeling, for example in your scout hut, in a kitchen, ...

- In groups of two, one wearing the blinded goggles, discover your usual environment. Caution: Do not walk alone. Blind people must be accompanied by a seeing guide. You might get hurt otherwise.
- In groups of two: A blindfold person is guided to a tree by a seeing person. Let the blind person touch the tree. Go back to where you started. Do not release the blindfold and let that person discover the tree just touched.



Do-it-yourself blindfold goggles.



Guiding a blind person.

- Eat together – the seeing helps the blind by describing what they find on their plates. (“Peas at eleven-thirty” – giving directions using clock-hand positions.)

Blindfold Yahtzee

Why not try Yahtzee? To play, some or the group are blindfold, then throw a dice. You need to use a larger size, so that the “blind” can feel the numbers more easily. Be patient, do not whisper answers – only write down what the blind decide.

Think of more games to play blindly.

Everyday’s a challenge

How do blind people structure their everyday life? On your next weekly or weekend meeting, give it a try to find out. One part of the group is blindfold, the other part remains seeing. Now try to pursue your activities in this way: Cook meals, clean up and play games together... For security reasons, every “blind” person should be accompanied by a seeing person to prevent injuries.

After having made your experience with seeing disabilities and blindness:

Debate in a group

Imagine the following situation:

A child severe inhibited in seeing wants to join your group.

Which problems can occur?

- for the child concerning your group’s activities? (Meeting hall, lavatories, kitchen, hiking and camping):
- for the other group members?

How can you tackle these problems?

Discuss: What are the major problems that people with seeing disabilities have to deal with?

7 One moment to change a lifetime

A life in a wheelchair – just roll with it!

I am a 19 year-old pupil and I've been sitting in a wheelchair for two years now. I've joined the scouts before my accident with a scooter. The accident happened, because I took the bend too far on the outside and hit the verge. Hence, I am paralysed from my chest downward. In consequence, I am completely numb in the paralysed sections of my body, and therefore I cannot move.

After the accident, I was in a hospital specialised for paraplegics for a long time. It felt like I had to start learning all over again.

I learned how to dress, to take a shower and especially how to support myself with my arms only in order to get from the wheelchair into bed or onto the couch. It took a long time, but the nurses, doctors and and physiotherapists were very kind and I had a good time there.

In this time, I learned a lot and shared experiences with other patients.

When I was younger, I did not know how to treat disabled people, as I hardly knew any. In-between, it has become normal for me to deal with people that do not fit in with society's ideals.

The most important thing that I was told right after awaking in my new life was that I was to become completely self-reliant again, and that there are more possibilities than one might think at the beginning.

Until this very day, my family, my friends and the staff of the hospital helped me to become the person I am today. It is to say that I am deeply grateful for this, because I know not everybody sees such a great support.

Still, my family, friends, both old and new, as well as the guides and scouts and my basketball team support me. Every day again, I feel that there is more to "go-get" than it seems. You just have to try.

As for the VCP, I join the camps, trying to take part without as much help as possible. I try scaling a slope without help, crossing the turf in the rain, sleeping on a camping mat and keeping pace with the others. In all this, I am strongly supported by the guides and scouts, and many of them have hilarious ideas how to climb over obstacles and to find solutions to any sort of problems. Up to now, I have not been disappointed.

Also, I try out all sorts of sports that I haven't even heard of before my accident, such as mono ski, basketball, badminton, swimming, rugby, table-tennis, archery, hand bike riding and karting. These sports and more besides you can easily pursue with a handicap, and it is fun to discover new things.

There are always new possibilities, you just have to look for them. Another hobby I will not reduce, but increase in frequency: travelling! In Germany, a lot is done to empower wheelchair riders to live a life as normal as possible:



That's me!

People who accompany a disabled person on a journey do not have to pay for the train ticket. This also applies for some cinemas or swimming pools. Of course, there is still more to be done, but it is already more than adequate.

Barrier-free access does not only apply for wheelchair riders, but also for elderly people whose mobility decreases with age, parents with prams, cyclists and travellers with heavy luggage.

In my opinion, the most important thing is to accept your handicap, emphasize the advantages and to forget about the drawbacks. Live now and smile at the world. And stay fit, because this keeps you self-reliant!

Even today, I am still learning new things, and I am trying to interpret the subtle signs of my body. Also, I find it important to share experience with like-minded people. They often know hints or tricks to improve my life just a little bit more.

That's why I am happy!

8 How to address disabled people respectfully

Can you say to a blind person “Good to see you again?” Are you going for a *walk* or *ride* with a person in a wheelchair? Many people are not sure about this matter. *Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband Hessen* would like to provide you with ten hints on how to overcome these insecurities. We would like to thank Katja Lücke for the cooperation and the *Paritätischem Wohlfahrtsverband* for the copyright permission.

Hint #1

Small talk: Do not offend by being curious

Do not ask your counterparts right away about the disability. It is their own decision to tell you. And if they are willing, they will let you know. Also, do not stare: It is inappropriate. Blind people do sense glances.

Hint #2

For your everyday life: Offer your help – and wait

Of course, it is polite to offer your help. Yet, it is more polite to wait for an answer. Many people become palpable by wanting to be helpful, but not everyone is willing to be “dealt with” and to be laid hands upon. You should accept that people refuse your offer.

Hint #3

How to address disabled people: talk to them, not about them!

Many disabled people are irritated about being ignored in a conversation. For example, the person accompanying is asked if the blind partner would like a drink. Do not hesitate talking to people with a handicap.

Hint #4

Be respectful: keep distance

People with disabilities especially mind their intimacy and people caring about their personal space. You should never caress a stranger’s head or pat their shoulder. It’s a no-no to mess around with a blind man’s cane or even use it as clothes rack.

Aids and supports are something intimate and personal for disabled people and taboo for others. You wouldn’t just grab someone else’s handbag, would you? Have in mind that a guiding dog is actually *working*, DO NOT distract it. Before stroking, ask the owner! And, of course, NO means NO.

Hint #5

Idioms vs. literal meaning

Do say “See you later” to a blind person or ask a wheelchair rider out for a *walk*. As a rule, disabled people do not find the use of idioms offensive.

Hint #6

Beware of discrimination

Some caution is needed when talking about people. Deaf people are not deaf-mute, they use the sign-language to communicate, as well as they are deaf, but not mute.

“Mongolism” isn’t a medical diagnosis, but discriminating. Instead, refer to it as “trisomy 21” or the “Down Syndrome”. Instead of “disabled”, say “people with disabilities”.

Hint #7**Look in the eyes**

It is a sign of respect to look someone in the eyes. For those inhibited in hearing, this is of special importance, as facial expressions and gestures help understanding. You probably know the effect of an instructor talking with the back facing the audience. Face your counterpart without shouting or using baby talk. Being deaf does not equal being dumb!

Hint #8**The translator is not in the focus**

If there is a sign-language translator at work, do not look at the translator, but at your counterpart, addressing directly that person in the 2nd form ("you"). For a sign-language translator, this means no offence. Generally speaking, (although not applicable to English, with at least British English being a very mannerful language) the use of the polite form while talking to adults is appropriate, no matter if disabled or not. That is, for German, use "Sie" instead of "Du", in French correspondingly "vous" instead of "tu".

Hint #9**Say rather more than less**

Especially for blind people, it is important to commu-

nicate thoroughly. Say "Hello, Max, it's me, Sarah. Mr. Smith is just entering the door." Let them know that you are leaving, as to avoid that your counterpart remains talking to an empty chair, thinking you are still there. It would be very disrespectful in face of a blind person.

Hint: When greeting a blind person, pay attention to the person's body language and ask to shake hands. Keep in mind that a handshake is an important opportunity to obtain information about you and to get to know you better. When you move places, offer your support: "Shall I take your arm?"

Hint #10**A matter of conscience: Have in mind that a disability is just a little part of a person's life**

"A wheelchair rider is a man or a woman, maybe a clerk, a club member, a parent and does even exceed speed limits," Katja Lücke says. A phrase like: "It is wonderful to see you are that mobile despite your handicap" is just as inappropriate as saying: "You are good woman driver". Being different is diversity, not a flaw. Disabled people are capable of many things that people without disabilities are astonished about.

Internet resources

On the internet you can find a great variety on helpful pages for wheelchair riders and for people with all kinds of handicaps. Just look for pages in English or in your language. There are pages of national policy-making organizations as well as of local institutions that can directly improve and support the life of handicapped people. Helpful pages are for example: sports/activities for handicapped persons, local or national charity organizations, local or national advisory boards, maps of wheelchair-accessible locations (www.wheelmap.org), self help groups etc.

Contact

VCP e.V.
 Wichernweg 3
 34121 Kassel
 Germany
 Phone.: +49 561 78437-0
 E-Mail: info@vcp.de
www.vcp.de

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Responsible referees of the National Board:

Juliane Bergmann, Neals Nowitzki

Authors:

Members of the project group "Guiding and Scouting – all inclusive"

Editors: Diane Tempel-Bornett, Tim Gelhaar

Translation: Christian Chinery

Layout: FOLIANT-Editionen, Ralf Tempel,
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