

Sighted Guide Techniques

I. Basic Sighted Guide Position and Alignment

- A. The sighted guide gives verbal cue ("would you like an arm/wrist") and/or nonverbal cue (touching the back of the person who is blind hand with the back of the guide's hand).
- B. The person who is blind should stand next to and slightly behind sighted guide, facing in the same direction as the guide. Therefore, the person who is blind is always at least a half step behind the guide.
- C. The person who is blind upper arm remains close to his or her body, with forearm and upper arm making a right angle at the elbow, with the forearm, wrist and fingertips aiming directly forward. The wrist is neither flexed nor hyper-extended, and the forearm neither angles toward the midline of the body nor away from the body, but aims straight ahead. The person who is blind grasps the guide's arm or wrist with the fingers toward the inside and the thumb toward the outside of the guide's arm.
- D. The guide's arm is grasped at a location such that the blind person's upper arm and forearm form a right angle. The height difference determines this. A preschooler may grip an adult's wrist, whereas a person who is blind that is taller than their guide may need to grip a guide's arm just under the armpit. The right angle allows for movement up or down for steps or curbs, etc.
- E. The person who is blind shoulder is directly behind guide's opposite shoulder, so that the pair are approximately one and one-half persons wide, except when traversing narrow passageways in which only one person can safely pass at a time.
- F. The person who is blind should be responsible for maintaining orientations as well as the proper grip and alignment with the guide, but if he or she is incapable of doing so, the sighted guide is responsible for monitoring this. The person who is blind non-grip hand can be used to confirm proper alignment by touching the guide's shoulders and aligning him/herself accordingly. The person who is blind can also assist with doors when appropriate, and the guide is responsible for the decision to transfer sides as needed to traverse doorways based upon the capabilities of the person blind.
- G. The sighted guide is responsible for the safety of the person who is blind at all times, regardless of the errors on the person who is blind part. The guide must be especially careful to monitor obstacles at various levels from head to toe. These obstacles not only include furniture, fixtures and people, but also overhanging head-high obstacles as well as slight irregularities in the walking surface, such as carpets, doorway moldings and changes of texture in the walking surface. If the person who is blind trips, it is the guide's responsibility to support the person who is blind. The guide should choose or adjust walking pace to accommodate the needs of the person who is blind.

II. Reversing Directions or Transferring Sides

(Note: either party can initiate a change of direction or a change of sides, after notifying the other of the need to do so.)

- A. Reversing directions: The pair comes to a complete stop, the person who is blind releases grip, and the pair turn toward each other while executing a 180° turn. The guide then reestablishes contact and the pair resume proper position and grip, traveling in the opposite direction.
- B. Transferring sides: There are two methods of transferring sides; based upon the ability and preference of the person who is blind.
 - 1. The most stable method is the grip method, done after the pair comes to a dead stop. The person who is blind places the back of his/her free hand just above his/her grip on the guide's heels and moves the

original grip hand across the guide's back to the guide's other arm as he/she sidesteps into the new position on the guide's other side, resuming grip with the appropriate hand.

2. The slide method of transfer can be done while stopped or while traveling, depending upon the abilities of the pair. The back of the person who is blind free hand contacts the guide's arm just above the original grip hand, with the fingertips pointing toward the guide's opposite arm. The person who is blind then releases the original grip and turns 90° toward the guide's opposite arm, trailing across the guide's back until the guide's opposite arm is gripped and the new alignment is achieved. Since trailing is less secure than a firm grip, and since this method required a change of direction, it is not recommended for lower functioning or physically unstable individuals.

III. Narrow Passageways

- A. The guide gives a nonverbal cue for the person who is blind to get directly behind the guide by moving the guiding arm back, placing the wrist in the small of the guide's back.
- B. The person who is blind slides his/her hand down to the guide's wrist, stepping diagonally backward to walk directly behind the guide. The person who is blind extends his or her arm in order to avoid stepping on the guide's heels, walking one full step directly behind the guide. The non-grip hand can be used to confirm proper single-file alignment.
- C. When the person who is blind is much taller or has a much longer stride than the guide, the guide may wish to extend his/her guiding arm backward from the small of the back. Although uncomfortable, it allows more room for the person who is blind greater stride.
- D. The guide may choose to reduce the pace and shorten stride slightly while going through the narrow space, then resume arm position, pace and stride after passing through the narrow space.

IV. Doors

- A. The guide gives the narrow passageway signal, always going through the door first. The guide's movements to open the door can sometimes be interpreted by the person who is blind as to whether the door is a push or pull door, as well as to which side the door opens. When approaching a pull door, the guide must stop farther back than he/she normally would, reach forward and pull the door back without stepping backward into the person he/she is guiding.
- B. With both push and pull doors opening to the side of the person who is blind, the person who is blind should anticipate contacting the door by putting his or her arm into a modified hand and forearm position. If the person who is blind does not do so, the guide must be responsible for assisting as necessary, while maintaining proper alignment through the doorway so that the person who is blind maintains the proper alignment through the doorway.
- C. The person who is blind is responsible for holding the door, which opens to his or her side. The sighted guide is responsible for seeing that the person who is blind is on the side away from the door opening if the person who is blind cannot hold the door. The guide is also responsible for holding the door or monitoring in such a way as to avoid injury to either party. The person who is blind hand should never slide on the door while it is opening or closing, nor should the door be contacted on the edge, but as close to the middle as possible.

V. Stairs

- A. In an unfamiliar area, the guide should indicate the presence of a level change, particularly novel types of stairs (deep, narrow, curved, etc.)

- B. With both ascending and descending curbs or stairs, the guide must take care to approach the stairs perpendicularly. In this way, the person who is blind is aligned so as to take the next step either up or down as the guide's movements indicate.
- C. The guide brings the person who is blind alongside to the edge of the steps so that neither person's toes extend over the edge of a descending step or under the extended edge of an ascending step.
- D. When a railing is available, it is best to have the person who is blind take the railing before the guide takes the first step, unless he/she requests otherwise.
- E. The guide takes the first step up or down in front of the person who is blind. The person who is blind waits until the guide has taken the first step, and both people work together to stay in step, with the person who is blind one step behind the guide at all times.
- F. The guide is responsible for monitoring and making adjustments so that when the guide is at the top or bottom, he or she pauses to indicate this while the person who is blind takes the last step. The guide's arm then moves directly forward (rather than up or down and forward) to indicate the level surface.

VI. Seating

- A. Place the person who is blind hand on the back of the chair and/or guide the person to the chair so that his or her knees or shins gently contact the edge of the seat. Tell the person that they are facing the front, back or side of the chair. For table/chair combinations or with stools or other unusual seating, explain the situation first, and then place the person's hand on it.
- B. In an auditorium or with similar narrow seating, the guide first explains the situation, and then enters the aisle by side-stepping side-by-side with the person who is blind, maintaining contact with the person who is blind by touching the backs of the each other's hands until they have located their respective seats.

* Allow the person who is blind to seat him/herself

VII. Other Important Tips to Remember

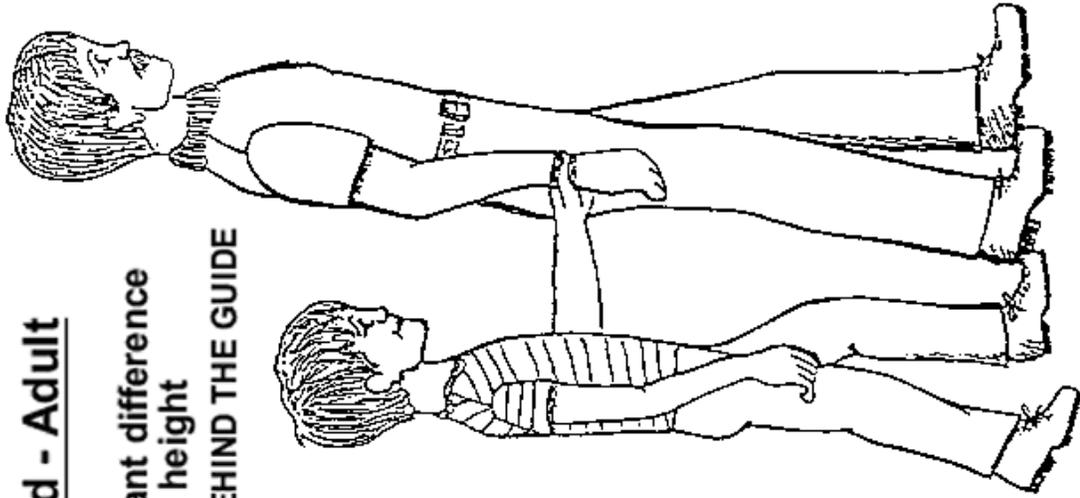
- A. Be considerate of the person who is blind need to know where he/she is, who and where you are, and who else is present. Encourage others to introduce themselves so that the person who is blind can locate them and connect names with voices.
- B. Never leave that person unless you first inform them. Make certain that he/she knows where you are going and when you will return, etc. If he or she is not sitting, it is helpful for them to have something substantial to touch (chair, table or wall) in order to maintain his or her orientation.

USE OF SIGHTED GUIDE

Child - Adult

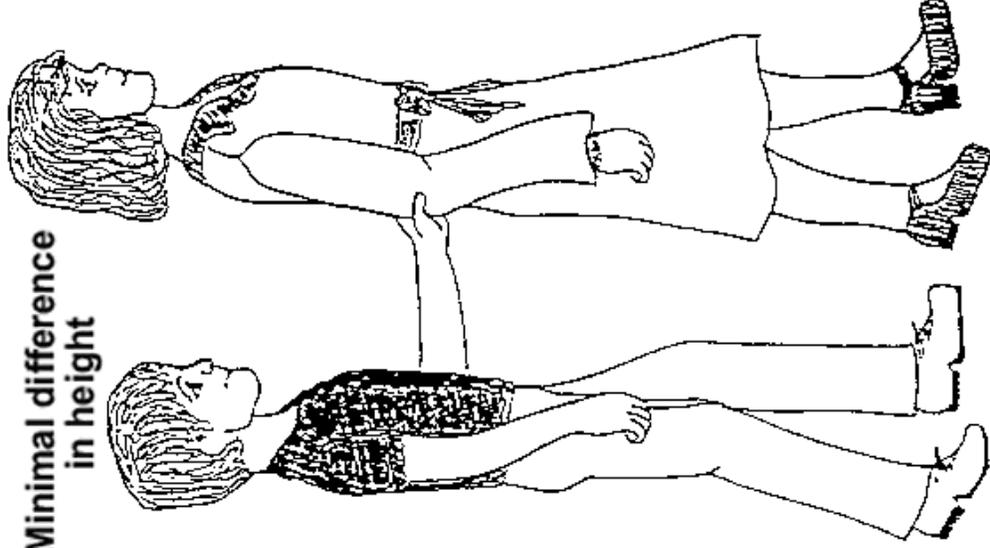
Significant difference
in height

1/2 STEP BEHIND THE GUIDE



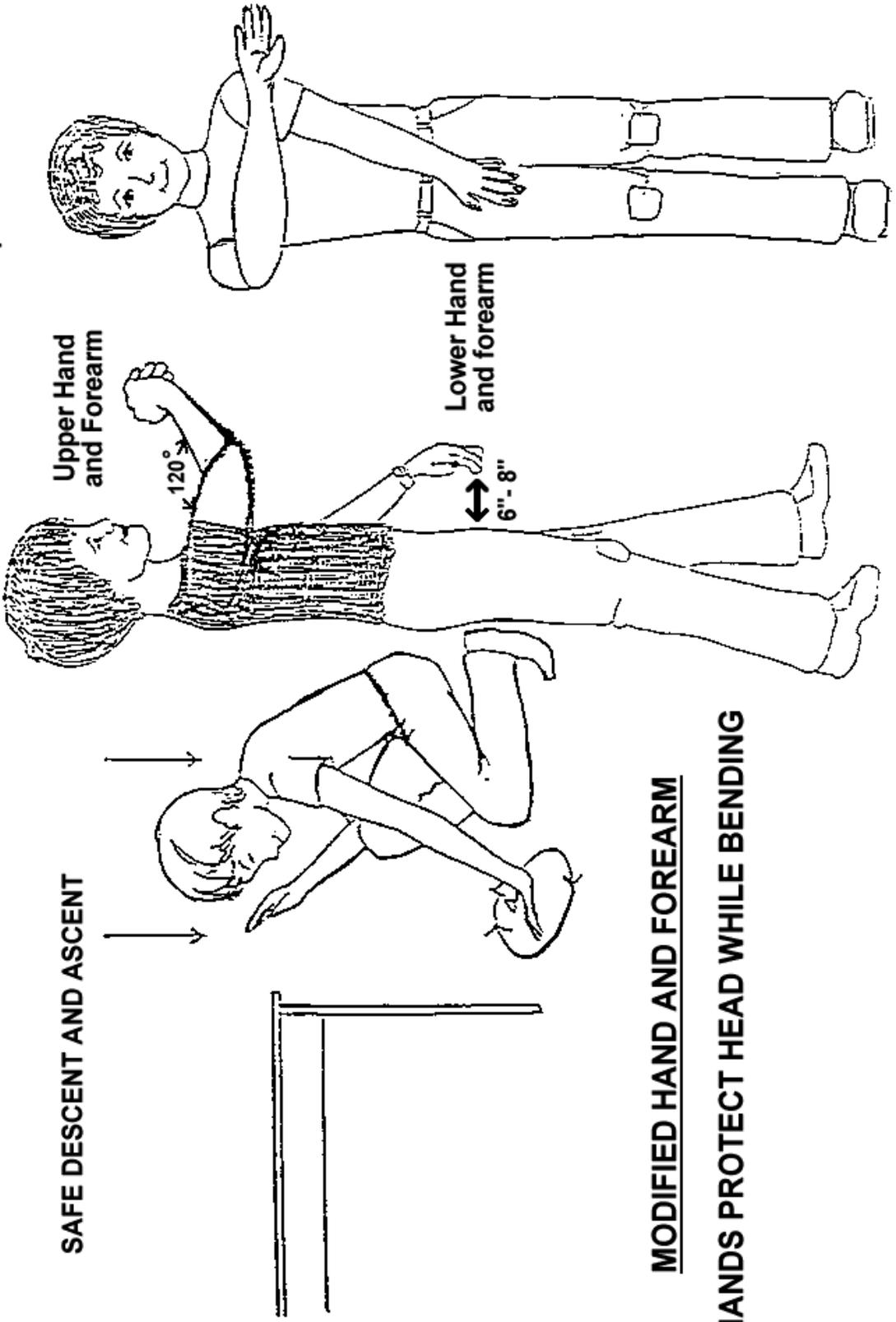
Child - Child

Minimal difference
in height



UPPER AND LOWER HAND AND FOREARM

Protective Techniques



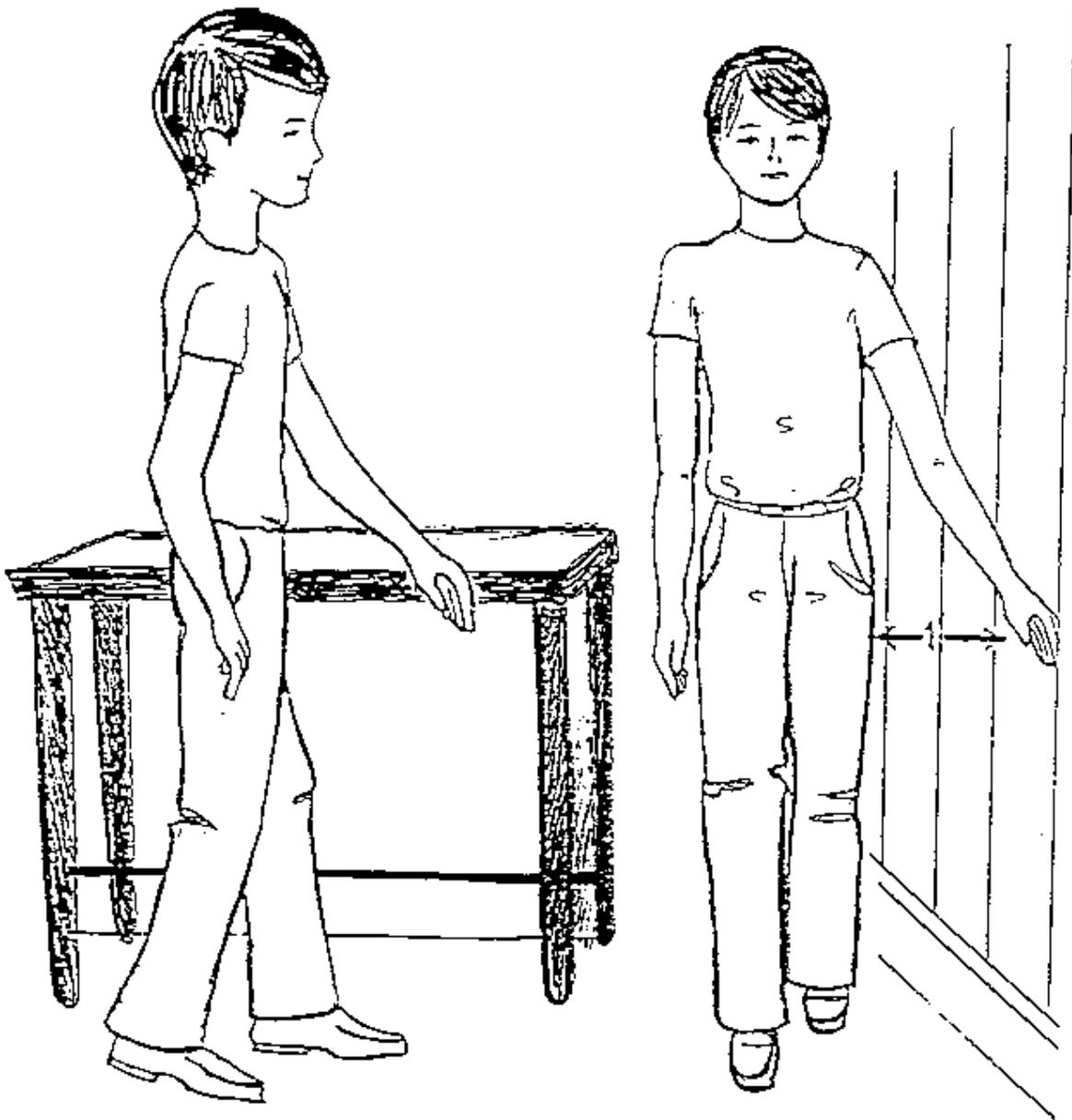
SAFE DESCENT AND ASCENT

MODIFIED HAND AND FOREARM

HANDS PROTECT HEAD WHILE BENDING

SIDE VIEW TRAILING TABLE

FRONT VIEW TRAILING WALL



Diagrams adapted from:
**A Curriculum Guide for the Development of Body & Sensory
Awareness for the Visually Impaired**
- Illinois State Office of Education, 1974