



YACHTING NEW ZEALAND

# COACHING TOOLS

## Coaching Visually Impaired Sailors

### What is it like to be blind?

To imagine what it is like to be blind, close your eyes tight, think of something you do every day and then work out how you would do it if you couldn't see. How would you pour a glass of water, tell the time or play a game? Remember, people who are blind use their other senses: touch, smell, hearing and taste to help them.

Some people are born blind and have no idea what the world around them looks like. Many people lose their sight when they are older and can remember what they have seen. Some people are totally blind and have no sight at all. **But, most people can see a little.**

### How can a sighted person help?

When you walk with a blind sailor:

- Ask if they need assistance.
- Offer them to take your arm (specify left or right).
- Extend your arm and the blind sailor will grasp it just above the elbow.
- Keep your elbow bent and tight to your body so that your forearm and that of the blind sailor are in a straight line.
- This should put you alongside each other with the blind sailor slightly behind.
- Walk at a natural pace.
- As you turn, the blind sailor will feel the turn through your arm and react accordingly.
- Inform the blind sailor of any major changes in the ground underfoot and overhead if dangerous.



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### Special Considerations for Boating Environments

When guiding blind sailors onto a gangway or boat ramp prepare them for a bumpy or slippery surface or a possible step or the opening at the top and bottom of gangway or boat ramp.

Be aware that travelling on floats and marinas can sometimes be hazardous if there are gaps or differences in buoyancy, requiring a step up or down. In such instances, the use of a cane to determine the nature of the step required is useful in addition to holding the guide's arm. Remember the stability of floats will be affected by people stepping on or off.

Fixed piers are less difficult to negotiate although pier endings without railings and other obvious hazards should be pointed out to the blind sailor in advance. Be aware that harsh shadows can be hazardous for low vision sailors trying to follow the guide, visually. If the blind sailor uses a dog guide he/she will either hold the dog's leash and take your arm or elect to hold the harness and command the dog to follow you. Arrangements should be made to leave dogs ashore when sailing, for the dogs' comfort and safety and of course, to protect the boats.

If the blind sailor uses a cane, he/she can hold the cane in a modified way to feel objects such as stairways, the boat, chairs and any other objects (either to locate them or avoid them) while being guided.

Describe distance in terms that a blind sailor will appreciate e.g. "there is a gap of an arm's length between the boat and dock." Greater distances may be expressed in the time likely to be taken to travel them. Guiding is exactly that - there is no need to push or pull, the motion of your arm will tell the person what to do.



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### COMMUNICATING WITH VISUALLY IMPAIRED SAILORS

**Do:**

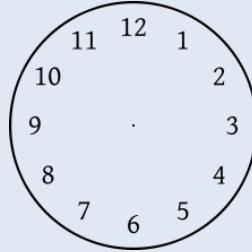
- Project your voice to overcome windy or other adverse situations, to make it heard by the whole crew/group.
- Provide timely and precise information on the manoeuvre required.
- Stipulate left or right according to the way the blind sailor is facing or port/starboard in relation to the boat.
- Speak to the blind sailor directly - not through their companions.
- Use the same sequence of instruction you would for a sighted person except describe, illustrate and demonstrate in order to effectively communicate what needs to be done, how it needs to be done and where it is located. For example: *"We're on a port tack and we're approaching a boat on starboard who has rights on us. In this case we can't just bear off behind the boat because we have a pier on the right side that would be too close. We could tack but it would take us further from our destination. I suggest that you slow the boat down by letting out the mainsheet, giving the other boat room to pass. Once we're clear, pull in the mainsheet to pick up speed and get back on course."*
- As appropriate and where possible, describe the general environment to the blind and vision impaired Sailors (and other crew) e.g., "on your right we are passing North Head."

**Don't:**

- Overly concern yourself with avoiding words like "look" and "see" as in "do you see what I mean?" and "look at it this way", etc.
- Describe objects and their location by pointing and saying "it's right there" or "watch out for that rock over there!"
- Shout (unless necessary due to adverse conditions).
- Be hesitant! The blind sailor needs to gain confidence in you, as a competent sailor and instructor.



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### Clock Analogy

The clock analogy is commonly used in describing the location or spatial arrangement of objects for blind sailors, e.g. on a dinner plate, it can be used to describe the positioning of different foods - meat at 6 o'clock etc.

This method can also be used to describe the location of objects relative to the boat, the bow of the boat being at 12 o'clock, e.g. "there is a buoy at two o'clock to the boat," or "the wind is now at 8 o'clock to the boat".

For objects aboard the boat it may be preferable to use the clock analogy relative to the person's body, the point at which the body is facing being 12 o'clock. Thus, the winch handle could be described to a person sitting on the leeward side of the cockpit as being "in a plastic holder inside the cockpit at three o'clock from you".

### Locating Wind Direction

Feeling the wind on your face is one of the most basic and useful ways of finding wind direction. While there are visual indicators such as flags and clouds, blind sailors should be advised of them as they may be not able to see them.

The feel of the wind on cheek, ear and back of neck should be identified. Coaches should continually test this awareness by periodically asking all sailors to locate the wind direction. (Sighted with eyes closed.) To help blind sailors identify the direction of the wind from various points, instruct them to move their faces back and forth until their noses points directly into the wind. Bear in mind, stronger winds will be easier to detect.

Next identify the direction of the wind when facing the direction the boat is moving. This involves learning the relationships between the vertical plane of the face, the centre line of the boat and the angle of the tiller.