

Getting Started with Your New White Cane

We're pleased to provide you with this white cane. Whether this is your first cane or you are an experienced user, we hope it will empower you to get around as independently as possible, as canes have done for so many others.

While people with vision loss have been using canes, staffs or sticks to get around for thousands of years, the modern white cane was introduced in 1930. The idea caught on quickly, and the white cane is now recognized internationally as a symbol identifying individuals with vision loss.

Types of White Canes

There are several different types of white canes that serve different purposes, and it's important to know which type best fits your needs. An Orientation and Mobility Specialist can help you determine which type of cane is best for you.

A **mobility cane** is designed as a navigation tool. It provides tactile feedback from the user's environment to detect objects and inform the user of what is ahead. They are usually made from a strong material like aluminum, graphite or fiberglass, and extend at least from the floor to the sternum. Some mobility canes can fold up in four or five sections for easier transport, but you might lose some tactile feedback with a folding cane. Mobility canes can come with a variety of tip sizes and shapes that can be used for different surfaces.

An **identification cane** is thinner than a mobility cane and folds up in smaller sections, making it even easier to transport. The main purpose of an ID cane is to let others know that you have vision loss, which can be helpful in high-pedestrian or high-traffic areas. ID canes can be used for navigation in a pinch, but they are not durable enough to use regularly for the purpose.

Support canes are designed to offer physical support and stability, and like ID canes they are white with red at the bottom to identify the user's vision loss. Support canes can be straight (rigid), but they are also available in folding sections and can have different handles for a more comfortable grip.

Orientation and Mobility Training (O&M)

If you plan to use a mobility cane, **we strongly recommend you work with a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)** to learn how to use it effectively, especially if you are feeling unsafe when navigating your surroundings. A COMS is a highly trained expert who specializes in working with individuals with vision loss to empower them to move around independently. A COMS may apply various instructional techniques to best meet the needs of each learner based on their own goals, travel environments and degree of remaining vision.

To find a COMS in your area, contact the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired in the Wisconsin Department of Health Services at 888-879-0017; or call us at the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired at 800-783-5213. Thanks to our generous donors, the Council is able to offer O&M services on a sliding fee scale.

WCBVI White Cane Program

The Council provides free white canes to any Wisconsin resident who is blind or visually impaired through its White Cane Program. The program does not receive any public funding; it is funded through donor gifts. Eligible residents can receive one free cane every 24 months.

Start Using Your Cane

Folding and Unfolding

If it is a folding cane, the first step is to learn how to fold and unfold it. There is an elastic strap that runs through all sections of the cane to keep them connected, holds the tip on at the bottom, and has a strap with a loop at the top of the cane by the handle. The purpose of the loop is to keep the sections bundled when folded. It is NOT to be used as a strap around your wrist when using the cane.

To unfold the cane, first make sure that you are in a space that gives you enough room that the cane will not hit other people or fragile objects. Next, hold the rubber handle securely in one hand, and use the other hand to pull the elastic loop up so that it is no longer securing the sections. The cane will then automatically fall together into a long straight line.

To fold the cane back up, again make sure that you have a cleared area. Hold the rubber handled section of the cane with one hand and pull the next section closest to the handle away from you using your other hand. Once separated, fold the two sections together, grasping the second section with your hand that is holding the rubber handle. Repeat this until the cane is completely folded up in single sections in your hand that has the rubber handle. Once all sections are folded and in one hand, place the fingers of your other hand into the loop. Open your fingers as wide as possible in the loop and slide it over the furthest end from the handle looping all the sections back together.

Cane Technique

1. Grip. The first step in using a white cane is to hold it correctly.

Hold it in your dominant hand with your hand centered in front of your body. Your index finger should point down the shaft of the cane and your thumb and other fingers should wrap around it.

2. Movement. Once you've got the right grip, you can begin to move your cane. When using your cane, most of your arm should remain still. All movement should come from your fingers and wrist. Make sure your elbow is bent comfortably. Once in a good stable position, begin moving your cane in a sweeping or arcing motion about the width of your shoulders.

3. Contact/Touch. The **constant contact technique** involves letting the tip of your cane constantly slide across the ground. You can also try the **touch technique**, which involves tapping the tip of your cane with each arc. If you're using this technique, you should never lift the tip of your cane more than an inch off the ground.

4. Rhythm. Next, make sure to move the cane in rhythm with your feet. When your right foot is forward, the tip of your cane should touch the ground on the left side of your body. If you're tapping your cane, there should be one tap with each step. It's important to keep a light touch. The lighter you touch something with the tip of your cane, the more information you'll be able to get from it. You'll be able to notice not only objects in your path but things like changes in terrain or cracks in the sidewalk.

We hope your cane will be a powerful tool as you navigate your vision loss journey. Feel free to contact the Council with any questions.