

VI Times

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MN Regions 5 & 7 Vision - O&M Staff
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Vision-O&M Staff

The purpose of a newsletter is to provide specialized information to parents and teachers of students with vision impairments. We hope to send regular newsletters that will cover topics of interest that are informative and create a base of knowledge that will assist our students with their on-going success!

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**Contact your
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/ Visually Impaired or
Certified Orientation
& Mobility Specialist
if:**

- You have further questions on the newsletter topic
- Would prefer the newsletter in electronic format by email or in print.

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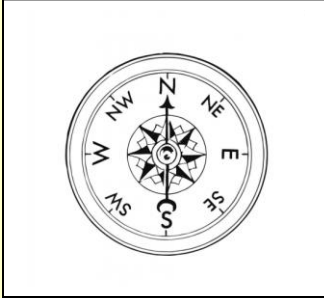
What is O&M?

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) is a specialty field within the area of services for students with vision loss. The service deals with the individual's ability to use environmental information to make good travel decisions with or without a white cane.

Travel may occur in the indoor or outdoor setting. The need for O&M is very individualized, not every student needs the same skills or training to accomplish their travel goals. Different needs are apparent at different ages, too. Younger students need less community travel outside than do older students. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) outlines what skills are to be developed.

During early childhood, the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) works with the child to develop safe travel around the house and day care. In elementary school, the COMS will emphasize travel in the school building and immediate the neighborhoods accessed by the child and family. Teens will learn complex travel skills in all settings and with public transportation as needed.

What is Orientation?



Student self-confidence is a key to safe travel.

Students who have impaired vision often do not have the opportunity to take in the full environment as we do with one glance. They encounter bits and pieces of the world and attempt to fit the pieces together to make sense of it. Sometimes there are gaps in the perceptions and the student may have misconceptions of the world and how it is put together.

COMS has the responsibility of discovering how the student uses environmental information to plan lessons that will connect the pieces and make a complete travel picture for the student. Lessons are planned at an age appropriate level to provide safe travel methods to the student.

The student forming a strong understanding of what is in the travel environment and what might be there are keys to good travel skills.

Orientation is the process by which a student learns to put the pieces of the world together for safe travel. The

What is Mobility?



Mobility addresses how the student moves through the environment in a safe and organized manner.

Walking through the classroom or the hallways at school with confidence and a sense of knowing where one is; moving from the bus stop into the classroom; walking around the block without fear of traffic that is parallel to the travel route are all examples of mobility experiences. These experiences with movement in safe and supervised environments will help the student develop good travel self-confidence.

Skills we take for granted, such as knowing how far to walk to get to a destination because we can see it in the distance, knowing when to step off a curb to cross a street safely, and many other skills of community travel are the focus of mobility. Moving one's body through space and being aware of

the areas around us must be taught in an alternate manner for students with vision loss. They must have more sensory information and structural information that is not easily observed concerning their environment.

Posture is often a factor in the mobility of students who have a vision loss. Viewing the information with low vision or lack of a visual interest due to blindness may cause postural deviations that can be fatiguing. Head, shoulder, and arm positions need to be in alignment for travel and movement to be efficient.

Physical stamina and endurance to not fatigue when traveling from point A to B is also important. It is necessary for good physical fitness and awareness of sound, textures, and smells to be used with as much efficiency as possible.

Who Uses a Cane?

Students with low vision or who are blind may use a cane. Canes are helpful when the vision loss is such that the individual needs additional cues for obstacles, drop offs, rises in the walking surface, etc. If the student has some usable vision, but needs more time to analyze intersections and cross streets, a cane for identification is often very helpful.

Canes come in all sizes and with a variety of tips on the end that touches the ground. The COMS will fit the student for a cane and determine the type of tip that will be most effective for the student's travel.



The canes you see in the picture above are aluminum and fiberglass. The tips are made of steel or nylon. The tips and canes do wear out with use.

Canes range in cost from \$9.00 to \$50.00. The weight, length and width of the cane are all individualized decisions made by the COMS.

Many people ask if it wouldn't be easier just to use a dog. The student really needs to have good O&M skills and be at least 16 years of age before considering a dog. The dog is only for safe travel, and the student must be the one to make the travel route planning and decision making work for successful travel.

Environmental Constants

For safe travel, we need to know what "should" be found in the travel or room area and we should be able to predict what we will find. This is what the concept of the environmental constant is all about.

For example, if you were to travel to McDonalds, you would expect to find the golden arches, smell the hamburgers cooking, know that people should be waiting for you behind the cash registers, drink machines, booths or small tables are arranged in a large open area with attached chairs, etc.



If you are in a park, you expect to see grass, trees, playground equipment, picnic tables, etc.

In a science classroom, you expect to see lab tables, smell chemical smells, have a teacher in the room, etc.

Arriving at a street corner, you are able to predict that you will find street signs, utility poles, fire hydrants, wheelchair cuts in the curb.

If you went into a room thinking it was the vending area of a hotel and found mops, brooms and extra sheets/towels—it wouldn't be a match for the environmental constants that you would predict.

Using environmental concepts helps the student develop good travel efficiency.

Topic Preview

Future issues of this newsletter will address:

- Braille
- Early Childhood Intervention
- Living Skills
- Parenting
- Self-Determination & Advocacy
- Sensory Efficiency
- Social Skills
- Technology
- Transition

Landmarks & Cues

Landmarks and their uses are essential to safe travel for students with vision loss. A landmark is a permanent structure or object that is located in an area or environment that tells the traveler he or she is in the correct location. Sometimes a landmark is a unique object, sometimes it is a grouping of objects or things that are specific to that destination or area, and other times it is a one of a kind thing.

Landmarks include:

- Buildings
- Bike racks in front of school
- Outline of a unique roofline of a house
- The double gym door next to the water fountain
- McDonald's arches
- The front of Casey's store
- A rock in front of a specific house
- A fence that ends just before the street crossing

Cues in the student's environment are helpful signals to alert him or her to make a travel decision, be careful, or continue on a route. Cues can be permanent or transient. They can be visual, sound, smell, or tactile.

Visual cues include:

- Lines (crosswalk, decorative line on a wall of the hallway)
- Angles (angle of the curb with a shadow to show depth)
- Curves (a rounded edge at the end of the sidewalk indicates a crosswalk)
- Stoplights (red, yellow, green)

Sound cues include:

- Sirens
- Feet walking rapidly past or approaching
- Dog barking

Tactile cues include:

- Rough / smooth walking surface
- Conveyor vs. edge of conveyor at the checkout
- Carpet by exit door

