

*Eye Diseases*  
*and the Importance of Maintaining Social Relationships*  
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On my first visit as a professional, who teaches the use of a long cane to persons who are blind or visually impaired, I begin by asking questions regarding the person's lifestyle. *In most cases I am told how active they used to be in the past – “the past”, of course, is when they had vision.*

We talk about transportation, family, friends, hobbies and things that they really like doing. And then what usually follows is:

*“I can't do that now.”*

*“I don't have transportation.”*

*“I feel as if I am looked at differently.”*

*“I am scared to go out by myself.”*

The list goes on and on.

I listen to all the *I CANT'S* and I reply, “You can do all the things that you did in the past as a sighted person (except drive an automobile).” But now there is a twist - you have to learn how to do things with your existing vision or even no vision at all.....believe it or not, it can be done! I tell them, “I believe in you, but you must believe in yourself as well.”

*Clearly the most important thing you can do is to maintain as many relationships as you possibly can.* This is important for both your mental and physical health.

It will take courage for you to ask for help or assistance from your friends and loved ones. But the truth is, when you were able to assist another person in the past, it made you feel good and worthy. So now is the time for you to make someone else feel good, and they may even feel hurt if you did not ask for assistance.

Remember, this is not forever. It is until you have registered into a program such as Braille or Department of Rehabilitation. You need to get going into one of these programs and Braille is the easiest program to begin taking classes towards independence.

Braille is a non-profit program that offers classes to help you learn to maintain your personal independence. Registration and attendance are free.

I highly recommend starting Braille as soon as possible. You will meet other people who are facing the same types of challenges. They will encourage you and stress the importance of maintaining your independence. Braille classes will teach you how to maintain your checkbook, cook, shop, clean, and also share experiences and knowledge with other students.

**Braille classes are free, but items such as calendars, bingo cards, magnifiers, video magnifiers, and talking computers, for example, are expenses that must come out of your pocket.**

**Often, when I explain to my students that there are items that could better help them maintain their independence, they are reluctant to spend the money. These aids are necessary not only in maintaining independence, but they also help to keep them more in touch with the world. I encourage everyone to purchase the items they need (if they have the money).**

**If a person does not have the money, then I encourage them to register with the Department of Rehabilitation. When you register with the Department of Rehabilitation you must be patient. They offer wonderful services but, once again, they have too little help for a large and growing population.**

**The orientation and mobility specialist, that Braille or the Department of Rehabilitation will send to your home, will have information about their class offerings, including lessons in using the long cane. The orientation and mobility specialist can also tell you about bus transportation, private transportation, Veterans' services, and information on senior centers. It is important that you register with these programs not only to maintain your personal independence, but also to help you maintain your existing social relationships, and to establish new social relationships as well.**

**Remember these agencies are there to help a person get going and continue to live life as they had prior to their loss of vision! Yes, it is an uphill climb in the beginning. But remember you are not alone and there really are people out there to help. Don't sit home alone. Remember the old cliché "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world." IT'S TRUE.**

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