

# ORIENTATION & MOBILITY

## Teaching students with a visual impairment to move safely and confidently throughout home, school, and community

Orientation is understanding where you are now, where you wish to go, and how to get there. Good orientation is built upon a child's understanding of his/her body in relation to the environment. Mobility is the physical ability to move safely, independently, and efficiently. The ability to move is a prerequisite for all learning.

Learning and using good orientation and mobility skills will have lifelong implications for a child's ability to participate in social, recreational, educational, and employment opportunities.

### **Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Services Provided by APSEA**

The Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority provides four types of O&M service:

- Assessment
- Direct instruction
- Consultation
- Intensive short-term training

The following areas may be included in the student's orientation and mobility program:

#### **Exploration and understanding of his/her environment**

- Concept development
- Training in the use of other senses as they relate to O&M
- Training in the use of residual vision
- Sighted guide technique
- Use of compass directions, landmarks, and other environmental information to establish and maintain orientation
- Cane travel
- Training and experience travelling in the home and school as well as residential, business, downtown, and/or rural areas
- The use of public transportation
- Low vision aid instruction
- Map use

#### **Related Areas**

- Personal safety
- Using a telephone
- Gathering information from the public
- Accepting and refusing public assistance
- Money organization

- Understanding of eye condition as it relates to orientation and mobility
- Problem solving skills
- Social interaction skills
- Physical fitness, posture, and gait

Levels of independence will vary with each child. Orientation and mobility instruction may help one child learn to move within his/her school without assistance, while a more advanced traveler may learn to use a city bus to go to a recreation centre, or to walk alone along a rural road to visit a friend.

Parental involvement in the child's O&M training and reinforcement of safe, independent travel in the community are important to program success.

## **Assessment**

A child is first assessed to determine his/her ability in various areas (e.g., concepts, pedestrian safety, cane skills, use of low vision). Skill areas that require development are identified and recommendations for the orientation and mobility program are then made. Assessment of a student's O&M skills by O&M staff can be arranged in the home area. An O&M assessment may also be part of a comprehensive or vocational assessment at the APSEA Centre.

## **Consultation**

O&M staff are available to assist staff, parents, and others working with any student with orientation and mobility needs, both at the APSEA Centre and in the child's home community. O&M staff work with itinerant teachers to assess and help develop O&M programs for children attending school in their home area. Inservices with teachers and parents are available upon request.

## **Direct Instruction**

Many children with visual impairments who are enrolled in their local schools receive orientation and mobility instruction as part of their education program. Orientation and mobility lessons are carried out by itinerant teachers in consultation with orientation and mobility staff. Students attending the APSEA Centre in Halifax may receive orientation and mobility instruction from O&M staff. Specific goals are included on the child's Individualized Education Program.

## **Short-Term Programs at the APSEA Centre**

Some of the special needs of children with visual impairments can be difficult to address in public school settings. Short-term programs at the APSEA Centre are designed to provide an intense level of instruction based on each student's identified needs. The length of each program varies. A positive aspect of all short-term programs is the opportunity it provides for students to meet other students who are facing similar challenges and mastering some of the same skills. Parents and itinerant teachers are encouraged to be active participants in short-term program planning, implementation, and follow-up.

*For further information, please contact:*

**Director  
Programs for Students who are  
Blind or Visually Impaired**

Tel: (902) 424-8510

Fax: (902) 424-0543

E-mail: [bvi@apsea.ca](mailto:bvi@apsea.ca)