FriendshipWorks

Ten Tips for Working with Elders with Vision Loss

Vision loss can affect social interactions and safety, especially for elders living alone. While vision loss in elders is not all the same, it frequently affects mobility, reading, computer usage, cooking, safety, driving and other daily living skills. Here are ten tips from optometrist, Dr. Cathy Stern, to support someone experiencing vision loss:

1. When walking with someone with vision loss, offer your arm and have them hold your elbow so you will be a half-step ahead of them. This allows them to feel your movements and quickly adjust their gate or direction of movement in order to move forward safely.

2. If a home has stairs, place bright, contrasting tape on each stair edge or paint a stripe on the edges of wood stairs. This goes for stairs both inside and outside.

3. Avoid the use of throw rugs, entryway mats or floor clutter like shoes to minimize falls.

4. White bathtubs should have the middle third of the threshold painted a contrasting color to make getting in and out safer.

5. Control glare by providing cool white light centered over a task area, as too much light can be as much of a problem as too little light.

6. Label kitchen cabinet doors, drawers and countertop canisters with contrasting paper and a bold, sans-serif font to make identifying important food or cooking items easier.

7. Place light colored food such as white potatoes on a dark plate and place darker colored food such as green vegetables on a white place for higher contrast and easier identification.

8. Encourage use of a black felt tip pen and light yellow paper for writing reminders or notes.

9. Large-type playing cards or tactile versions of games will allow someone with vision loss to maintain social interaction and social contacts.

10. Always talk directly to the person with vision loss and do not talk around them by directing questions to a nearby relative or friend. Also don't shout if a person has no significant hearing loss.