

October 15 was International White Cane safety Day! Here are 10 things you need to know about white canes.

What is a white cane?

1. A white cane is a mobility tool that enables the person to move about safely and independently. It also acts as a symbol that the person carrying it is blind or has low vision.
2. The cane is long enough to be about two steps ahead of the person's feet. This allows the walker to **find objects with the cane before hitting them.**
3. There are three types of canes:
A long cane usually comes midway up the person's chest and has a teflon tip that is used to preview the environment, assisting the user to identify surface changes, slopes, steps, kerbs and obstacles.
A symbol / ID cane is shorter than a long cane and is around 70cm in length. It is used only to indicate to others that the person has a vision impairment. It doesn't give the user any information about the environment.
A support cane is used by people who need extra support when walking but also want to indicate they are blind or have low vision.
4. White is used internationally to signify blindness or low vision. In New Zealand we follow the American colouring with the red on the bottom section of the cane - this improves visibility. On long canes the tape is reflective.
5. The primary role of the cane is to provide information about the environment through contact of the tip with the ground. There are electronic devices that can be fitted to a cane to provide additional information.

How can you help a cane user?

6. Ask a person who is blind or has low vision if they want help. Please do not grab the person or their cane to indicate assistance.
7. Be on the look-out for pedestrians who are blind or have low vision as they may take longer to cross the road than expected.
8. Do not over shoot the white line when you stop at a red light.
9. Do not yell instructions, gesture or use your horn to communicate with the cane user. This could lead to confusion.
10. When you are driving do not stop for the cane user to cross the road if the light is green for you. Traffic coming towards you might not stop and the cane user could get stuck waiting in the middle of the road. This is a dangerous situation for the person to navigate through.

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