

Module: **Developmentally Appropriate Orientation and Mobility**

Session 1: Foundations of Developmentally Appropriate Orientation and Mobility

Handout K: Guide Techniques for Toddlers

Sapp W. (2004). *Guide techniques for toddlers*. Chapel Hill, NC: Early Intervention Training Center for Infants and Toddlers With Visual Impairments, FPG Child Development Institute, UNC-CH.

Guide technique, sometimes referred to as human guide or sighted guide technique, is a method of traveling with another person that allows the person with a visual impairment to take an active role in traveling safely and efficiently in a variety of environments. Formal guide technique was designed for an adult walking with an adult and is not physically possible or developmentally appropriate for toddlers with visual impairments. The technique is modified for children and toddlers due to their small size. Children who are blind and children with low vision will benefit from learning an adapted guide technique as they learn to walk.

Note: There are at least as many ways to teach guide technique to toddlers as there are toddlers with visual impairments. The suggestions given below are general guidelines that have been found to be effective with some children. You will have to adapt and create techniques to meet the unique needs of the children and families with whom you work.

As soon as children start to walk, they may begin using guide techniques. With the family, decide on what phrase you will use, such as “Let’s walk sighted guide” or “Take my hand.” Be sure to use a phrase that the child and parent can distinguish from the parent *holding* the child’s hand for safety or to increase speed. When traveling in a safe environment, use the agreed-upon phrase to tell the child to use guide technique. Use hand-under-hand modeling to position the child’s hand holding on to the adult’s fingers. At this point, it is OK if the child’s hand completely encircles the adult’s fingers rather than using a formal C-grasp (with the thumb on the inside of the guide’s hand and the four fingers on the outside). To help the child to continue holding the adult’s fingers, the adult may gently place his or her thumb on the back of the child’s hand as a physical reminder.

Identifying proper environments for using guide technique is essential. In guide technique, the child can easily pull away which would be dangerous in some situations. When young children are traveling in potentially dangerous situations (e.g., a parking lot, near a drop off), they should *not* use guide technique. In these environments, parents, caregivers, and teachers should hold their children’s hands just as adults do with sighted children. If children are traveling in a familiar environment in which they can explore independently, they should

not use guide technique; they should be allowed to travel independently. If parents are in a great hurry, they will probably prefer not to use guide technique because it usually requires a slower pace than does holding a child's hand.

Orientation and mobility specialists (OMSs) should help parents and teachers find environments and times when the child can safely practice guide technique every day. Examples of times a child might use guide technique include walking across the grass from the swings to the sand box at the playground, visiting a friend's home for the first time, walking from the door to the car in the family's driveway or at preschool, and taking a leisurely shopping trip in an uncrowded store. With a little creativity and forethought, adults can find multiple opportunities for the child to practice guide technique every day.