

Factsheet: What is Orientation & Mobility?

Overview

Orientation & Mobility (O&M)

Orientation & Mobility refers to the skills required to enable a person with low vision or blindness to travel safely and purposefully through their environment.

Orientation means knowing your position in space, in relation to other objects, people and places.

- Where am I now?
- Where am I going?
- How am I going to get there?

Mobility is the physical act of moving through the environment safely and efficiently. This might be through the use of a mobility aid, such as a long cane, or learning to use functional vision effectively.

Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Specialists work with individuals of all ages. Programs can begin in infancy and early childhood, focusing on the development of foundational skills. O&M is a core component of the Expanded Core Curriculum for children with low vision or blindness.

O&M programs may involve the use of a mobility aid such as a long cane or teaching a person to use functional vision safely and efficiently.

- O&M programs are individual, and always developed in collaboration with the person and their family so interventions can be embedded in the person's daily routines.
- Important times to think about O&M assessment and intervention may include:
 - Upon a recent diagnosis of vision loss, or a change in an existing vision condition.
 - For children, transitioning between home and early childhood, moving into primary or secondary school.
 - For adults, changes such as moving to a new house, starting a new job or studying at university.
- If there are functional difficulties such as seeing step or kerb edges, coping with glare in the environment, travelling through busy environments, or using public transport.

Orientation Skills

There are a number of fundamental concepts and skills important to orientation:

Body image/body concepts	This means understanding the parts of the body, how they relate to each other and how they move through space.
Left/Right concepts	Understanding of the terms 'left' and 'right' and understanding that these terms are relative to body position.
Directionality	Compass and clock-face directions.
Spatial concepts	Understanding the concept of space in the environment. Having a concrete understanding of concepts such as 'front', 'back', 'side', 'across'?
Concepts of time & space	Relating time to movement. How long will it take me to get to my destination?
Environmental concepts	Understanding terms used to describe our environment. For example: road, kerb, hill, roof, car, railway line, bus stop, or beach. Using descriptive language and providing hands-on experience is important when learning these concepts.
Mapping skills	Using a range of maps including visual, tactile and audio.
Sensory development	Learning to use other senses including touch, hearing and smell, as well as proprioception (awareness of the position and movement of the body).
Problem solving and decision-making skills	Strategies for dealing with unexpected changes in the environment, knowing what to do if you become lost.

Mobility Skills

Mobility skills include:

Guiding

Travelling safely with another person as a guide.

Protective techniques

How to protect the body when moving through space.

Establishing position in the environment

Maintaining a straight line of travel, crossing open space.

Using a mobility aid

Long cane, identification cane, support cane, dog guide.

Using a low vision aid

Monocular low vision aids can be used for reading street signs, locating bus numbers.

Community travel

Using public transport, taxis or ride-sharing services.

What qualifications does an Orientation & Mobility Specialist have?

O&M Specialists in Australia complete post-graduate training and come from varied backgrounds including Allied Health and Education. O&M Specialists can register with the professional body, the Orientation & Mobility Association of Australasia (OMAA) to become a Registered Orientation & Mobility Specialist (ROMSA). This means they have completed comprehensive O&M qualifications, have demonstrated professional competence in the workplace, and passed the international exam for Certified O&M Specialists (COMS).

Websites and Links

Some useful websites for further links and information on O&M are:

Orientation & Mobility Association of Australasia:

<https://www.omaaustralasia.com>

Vision Aware (United States):

<https://visionaware.org/everyday-living/essential-skills/an-introduction-to-orientation-and-mobility-skills/>

Family Connect (United States):

<https://familyconnect.org/education/expanded-core-curriculum/orientation-and-mobility/123/>

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