

# 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:**

<b>Body image/body concepts</b>	This means understanding the parts of the body, how they relate to each other and how they move through space.
<b>Left/Right concepts</b>	Understanding of the terms 'left' and 'right' and understanding that these terms are relative to body position.
<b>Directionality</b>	Compass and clock-face directions.
<b>Spatial concepts</b>	Understanding the concept of space in the environment. Having a concrete understanding of concepts such as 'front', 'back', 'side', 'across'?
<b>Concepts of time &amp; space</b>	Relating time to movement. How long will it take me to get to my destination?
<b>Environmental concepts</b>	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.
<b>Mapping skills</b>	Using a range of maps including visual, tactile and audio.
<b>Sensory development</b>	Learning to use other senses including touch, hearing and smell, as well as proprioception (awareness of the position and movement of the body).
<b>Problem solving and decision-making skills</b>	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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