



# Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

## Instructional Resources Library

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## Using Landmarks and Clues to Help Your Student Know Where He Is in the World

### What IS O&M

**Orientation** is knowing where you are and being able to plan how to go where you want to be. Mobility is the actual movement from place to place. Together, orientation and mobility are commonly referred to as “**O&M.**”

Every person who is deafblind can benefit from O&M instruction to help him understand the world around him, where he is in it, and how to travel within that world as safely and purposefully as he is able. As the intervener, you are in the ideal position to help your student master O&M skills as you practice them in daily routines and activities. The O&M Specialist who is working with your student, either through direct services or by consultation, is the person who should consult closely with you to ensure your student is given the techniques and strategies needed. The O&M Specialist can also give you suggestions for how to help orient your student to objects and people and how to safely travel to reach them. They should also support you in learning techniques such as a sighted guide or proper use of a cane.

### What are Landmarks and Clues?

For a child to acquire independence during travel, he must have a solid orientation foundation. Orientation is made up of two essential elements – clues and landmarks. Both elements encompass all available sensory information (auditory, tactile, olfactory, and visual).

**Clues** are temporary information.

**Landmarks** are permanent or always present.

To use clues and landmarks, the child needs to be able to identify common household and environmental sounds, smells, temperatures, and textures. Some examples of clues are the sound of a lawn mower, the smell of hotdogs cooking on a grill, balloons that mark the place for the party, and light from windows. Some examples of landmarks are the feel of a wooden floor, a fire extinguisher box in a long hallway, the swing set on a playground, and the curb cut at the crosswalk.

### Ideas to try

**Working closely with your student’s O&M Specialist**, try to incorporate the following strategies into routines your student finds meaningful and recognizable to help the student gain a better understanding of how to use landmarks and clues to orient himself:

- Choose a room in the home that the child needs to become better oriented in so he can safely move about it on his own and find what he needs. This is also applicable if the child is not mobile because he can learn to know where he is and feel more comfortable being left alone for a few moments in the room.
- Take some time to analyze how that room is set up. Choose a few clues and landmarks that would help the child orient to that room. Below is an example of clues and landmarks chosen for a bathroom:
  - **Tactile:** tile floor (landmark), fluffy rug (clue)
  - **Auditory:** everything sounds louder (landmark), toilet flush (clue)
  - **Visual:** the bright checkered pattern of floor tile (landmark), bright lights reflecting in the mirror when they are on (clue)
  - **Odor:** soaps and shampoo smells (landmarks), stinky toilet (clue)
  - **Temperature:** cold tile floor on bare feet (landmark), steamy feeling after someone has showered (clue)
- Once you have chosen the landmarks and clues to point out to the child and have decided on a systematic way to introduce them to him, choose a time when he would be most willing to let you show him or help him explore the clues and landmarks.
- Tell/sign to the child that the room is going to be explored. Use a consistent name for the room, and always enter the room the same way. Proceed to explore the room with the child. If he is not mobile or tends to either just sit or wander about, it would be best if you systematically direct the exploration. This means exploring the perimeter around the wall areas first and then what is in the middle. If the child is mobile and curious, let him take the lead. Take time to help the child learn about each landmark and the chosen clue; give him names for them. Take note if the child seems to show interest in one of the landmarks. That could become a home base for him in that room. Communicate when the activity is finished.
- Do this more than once in the same room. Observe how the child begins to orient himself to the room on his own. Do you see him developing his own mental map?
- Do this with every room and area in the home (or school) that the child spends time in. Sometimes, to aid in orientation, create a new clue or landmark in an area. For example, using a bright strip of color that has a different texture than the rest of the floor to mark the top and bottom of the stairs can help the child know he is at the stairwell. This may also be a safety feature.
- Choose an outdoor area in which to teach the child the use of specific landmarks and clues.
- Help the child become oriented in areas that connect rooms, such as the hallway or entryway. Outdoor connecting areas might be the area between the back porch and the backyard or the area between the front porch and the sidewalk in front of the house.

Learn to Move – Move to Learn!

Adapted from Understanding Deafblindness: Issues, Perspectives, and Strategies Vol 2, Orientation and Mobility for Infants and Young Children, Linda Alsop, Editor, Ski- Hi Institute, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.