Understanding ALL white canes

The original purpose of a white cane for blind people was as a traffic safety beacon. The colour was chosen because it would be easy for drivers to spot.

Over the years, once the techniques to employ the cane as a mobility tool were developed, the common perception became that white canes would be used exclusively by totally blind people to gather tactile information, and the traffic safety function was largely forgotten.

There is a continuum of types and amounts of blindness, from low vision to no vision. Hence the term “blindness spectrum”.

ALL white canes symbolize their user is on the blindness spectrum. Solid white or white with a red tip mean the same. The red is to increase visibility against light backgrounds such as snow.

These canes include:

ID Canes, also known as Symbol canes, are light weight and relatively short. They are used primarily to communicate blindness and may also be used to gain some tactile information.

Support Canes which are used for weight bearing and balance and generally aid in stability.

Mobility Canes, also known as Long canes, these are the types that are most recognized by the general public, as they are used in the side to side sweeping or tapping methods that help people locate obstacles and landmarks.

Some people who use mobility canes may choose to use a black or coloured cane. In this case the colour is a fashion choice. Sometimes children are taught mobility techniques using coloured canes. The colour of these mobility canes has no meaning.

ALL white canes symbolize the user has total or partial blindness.

A tip for drivers:

**DO:** Take caution when you see a person with a white cane, in case they make a mistake and step onto the road out of turn.

**DO NOT:** If you have the right of way and see a person with a white cane waiting to cross a street, do not stop to give them the right of way to cross in front of you.

They do not know why you are stopping and are very unlikely to see you waving them across. People who take orientation and mobility training are instructed not to go in situations like this. They are taught to adhere to the rules of the road.

And please don’t honk! It can be very alarming and disorienting.