

The Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COMS) is defined as and has the following roles and responsibilities:

Orientation & Mobility



A significant and immediate consequence of visual impairment is the restriction in one's ability to travel through physical and social environments and to anticipate and exercise control over potentially hazardous situations. The skills needed to move safely and confidently through an environment are developed through instruction in Orientation and Mobility (O&M).

O&M training can be broadly defined as teaching the concepts and skills necessary for students to travel safely and efficiently in their environments. Orientation skills enable people with visual impairments to use sensory information to know their location in different settings, and mobility skills enable them to travel in different areas. People travel to different destinations using different techniques (such as the sighted guide or trailing techniques) or by using assistive devices (like the long cane and the wheelchair).

O&M training encompasses much more than teaching students to use a long cane. It begins early with concept development and continues with training in auditory skills, safety issues, and problem solving and in the use of assistive technology, community resources, and public transportation systems. O&M instruction is equally important for students who are blind and for those with low vision. To be effective, it should be an integral part of a student's day; that is, a student should use O&M techniques for many activities (such as using a map to complete an assignment, walking to the cafeteria, or meeting the school bus). Students who have well-established O&M skills can incorporate what they have learned in O&M training to travel in their environments safely and efficiently.

Foundations in Education – 2nd Edition p530 Editors: Alan J. Koenig and M. Kay Holbrook.

Scope of Practice

Orientation and Mobility Instruction is a sequential process in which visually impaired individuals are taught to determine their position within their environment and to negotiate safe movement from one place to another. The skills involved in this teaching include but are not limited to:

- Concept Development, which includes body image, spatial, temporal, positional, directional, and environmental concepts
- Motor Development, including motor skills needed for balance, posture, and gait, as well as the use of adaptive devices and techniques to assist those with multiple disabilities.
- Sensory Development, which includes visual, auditory, vestibular, kinesthetic, tactile, olfactory, and proprioceptive senses, and the interrelationships of these systems.
- Residual Vision Stimulation and Training
- Familiarization
- Sighted Guide Technique
- Upper and Lower Protective Techniques
- Locating Dropped Objects
- Trailing
- Squaring-off
- Long Cane Techniques
- Soliciting/Declining Assistance
- Following Directions
- Utilizing Landmarks
- Search Patterns
- Compass Directions
- Route Planning
- Analysis and Identification of Intersections and Traffic Patterns
- The use of Traffic Control Devices
- Techniques for Crossing Streets
- Techniques for travel in indoor environments, outdoor residential, small and large business districts, mall travel, and rural areas.
- Problem Solving
- The Use of Public Transportation
- Evaluation with Sun Filters for the Reduction of Glare
- Instructional Use of Low Vision Devices
- Map Reading





Orientation and Mobility FAQ

At what age should my child receive O&M services?

This is an individual decision that should be made by you and an O&M instructor. There is not a set age at which O&M training should begin. Remember, many things can be done to enhance O&M skills before a child begins walking.

Should my child learn to use a cane? If so, when?

O&M instructors typically teach children and adults who are blind or severely visually impaired how to use a cane for protection and for gathering information about what is in front of them. Several factors need to be considered in the decision about whether a child should use a cane (actual and perceived), maturity level, and ability to manipulate a cane while walking. Some reasons for a child of any age to use a cane include helping them get around better in their current travel environment or enabling them to travel in new places. The need for a cane is an individual determination. Your child may benefit from cane instruction now, or may not need a cane until they are ready to go places by themselves. You should ask your O&M instructor to help you decide when and if your child should use a cane.

Who should provide O&M services for my child?

An O&M instructor. O&M instructors are trained to teach travel concepts and techniques to enhance the independent travel skills of persons who are blind or visually impaired. Although an O&M instructor will provide suggestions, information, and ideas on a child's development and O&M needs, family members are the child's best teachers. You, the child's family, have the most love and concern for the child's best interests, and time to teach and reinforce O&M skills. A partnership between yourself and the child's O&M instructor will greatly help your child learn and grow. Also, an O&M instructor can help your child's day care provider or preschool teacher learn how to work best with a blind and visually impaired child. If your child is school age, the O&M instructor will also work with your child's primary teachers.

Orientation and Mobility

Roles and Responsibilities

The techniques and strategies learned in O&M training are lifelong skills. They need to be used in all aspects of a student's life including school, home, and the community.

Many different individuals play a role in implementing and utilizing these important skills. It takes a team effort, not just the expertise of the O&M Specialist, to create a confident, independent, and safe traveler.

Parent

- Be involved in the O&M process and reinforce O&M skills
- Assist in incorporating O&M skills into everyday life
- Communicate O&M needs and concerns to others
- Promote independent travel with other family members, friends, etc.
- Provide travel experiences in the community
- Be involved in the IEP process
- Promote self-advocacy

O&M Specialist

- Conduct O&M assessments and design an O&M program tailored to meet each child's needs
- Provide instruction in O&M skills in various environments
- Prepare and use equipment and materials including such things as tactile maps, models, etc.
- Provide orientation of new school buildings and new class schedules
- Teach the use of a cane or assistive/adaptive mobility device and electronic travel devices
- Consult with and provide in-service training to other staff, peers, and IEP team members
- Report progress
- Be involved in the IEP process
- Promote Self-advocacy

VI Teacher

- Reinforce basic O&M skills as requested by O&M Specialist
- Monitor for safety with independent travel
- Collaborate with others regarding O&M issues
- Promote attitudes for independent travel
- Be involved in the IEP process
- Refer students for O&M assessments
- Promote Self-Advocacy

Classroom Teacher

- Reinforce and promote good travel and cane skills
- Monitor for safety
- Collaborate with others regarding O&M issues
- Be involved in the IEP process
- Help teach/reinforce some O&M related skills including such things as body parts, functions, compass directions, clock systems, following directions, measurement of time and space, and numbering systems
- Promote self-advocacy

Paraprofessional

- Support and reinforce O&M skills as advised by O&M specialist
- Encourage independent travel and appropriate travel skills
- Monitor for safe travel
- Collaborate with others regarding O&M issues
- Be involved in the IEP process
- Promote self-advocacy

Other Staff

- Encourage independence
- Monitor for safety
- Promote self-advocacy

Peers

- Provide proper assistance when necessary
- Encourage safe and independent travel

Orientation and Mobility

Process

Orientation and Mobility instruction is age appropriate ongoing training, which teaches students with visual impairments to move safely and independently as possible in home, school, work, and community environments.

Orientation and Mobility Specialist are professionals with specialized training who have completed an approved certification program. Every visually impaired child has a right to an evaluation by an orientation and mobility specialist to determine current level of functioning and projected needs. Based on the needs identified in the evaluation, the child may receive orientation and mobility instruction. Using a team approach, goals and objectives will be developed for specialized instruction in orientation and mobility.

Based on the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), a comprehensive evaluation is required every three years. All families and staff share in the responsibility to reinforce independent orientation, movement, and travel.

Initial referral/re-evaluation:

1. The Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired or other professional will complete an initial screening process prior to contacting the orientation and mobility specialist to make a referral for an evaluation.
2. The teacher of the blind & visually impaired or other professional will share screening instruments and referral forms with the O & M specialist **along with relevant medical and educational information such as Low Vision reports, Ophthalmological exam information and IEP's.** The IEP case manager and O & M Specialist will develop a plan for assessment.
3. The IEP case manager will obtain permission to evaluate or re-evaluate with parents or guardians.
4. Upon receipt of permission the IEP case manager will notify the O & M specialist.
5. The evaluation will be conducted by the O & M specialist and the results will be shared with the IEP team for development of an appropriate educational plan.

Progress Reports:

The orientation and mobility specialist will report each student's progress to the IEP case manager based on the frequency stated on the IEP.

Service Delivery:

The orientation and mobility specialist will address needs via direct and indirect service. Indirect service includes training or consultation with teaching staff, parents, and administrators. Areas addressed include team member's role, techniques, and review of equipment and materials. Continuous quality reinforcement of the student's skills will be ensured by those who will be carrying out portions of the orientation and mobility programming in the student's least restrictive environment.

Equipment and Materials:

The IEP Team will address special needs of the student at the IEP meeting regarding equipment and materials. (ex. canes, a monocular, mapping materials, etc.)

Scheduling:

The IEP team in conjunction with the O & M specialist will determine scheduling based on the individual needs of the student.