CHAPTER FOUR VISUALLY IMPAIRED SKIERS

GENERAL A visually impaired (VI) skier has some degree of loss of vision that requires the instructor to guide the skier down the hill safely. VI students present a unique challenge to an instructor as the use of the demonstration in teaching is severely limited. Teaching VI students is not near as difficult as it may seem as the person with blindness or poor vision is likely quite used to being guided and their other senses are usually finely tuned to compensate for lack of vision.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

- Observe the student on arrival, how is the student being guided? How is the student walking? If the student uses his/her feet as "feelers" this could affect stance.

- If the student can see, check distance, forward, and lateral vision, how clear is their vision?

- Was the vision impairment organic or traumatic? There may be secondary or hidden physical or cognitive disabilities that may impact on strength, balance, endurance, or mood.

- How long has the skier had the impairment? Someone who has recently lost vision may have more challenging balance problems when skiing.

EQUIPMENT

Skis. Normal alpine skis and poles.

Boots. Normal boots. Ensure a proper fit. Uncomfortable boots seriously degrade learning.

Eye Protection. Ensure the student's eyes are protected by goggles or sunglasses.

Bibs. Blind Skier bib and Blind Guide bibs will be worn by both student and instructor to warn other skiers on the mountain.

COMMUNICATION AND GUIDING TECHNIQUES

One of the most important aspects of communicating with your student is consistency. Discuss with your student guiding options and decide which one is best for both of you. Always use a firm confident voice. Use normal voice and tone. It is very important that your quickly establish in your student trust and confidence that you will guide them safely down the Mountain.

Communicating

- Determine and agree with your student on **emergency commands**. I.E. “slow down!”, “sit down!”, “stop!” and **“STOP NOW!”**

- Determine and agree with your student on **direction commands**. I.E. “turn right!”, “turn left!”, “turn, turn, turn!”, “straight ahead!”, “steady on!”, “hold, hold, hold!” (traverse).

- Determine and agree with your student on **descriptive commands**. I.E. **Steepness.** Describe fully or use a number system “One!”(almost flat), “Two!”(gentle slope), “Three!”(moderate slope), “Four!” (steep). I.E. **Shape.** “Small bumps!”, “Corduroy!”, “Heavy snow!” “Fall line at 9 o’clock!”

- Always maintain verbal contact with your student or use a sound device such as a bell, tapping poles together, whistling, etc. Instruct your student to **stop** if they cannot hear you.



- Use **“Hands On”.** Stand in front of your student and take their hands in yours. The student hands represent the student’s feet and skis. Manipulate the student’s hands to duplicate the movement and position of their feet/skis. This method is an excellent tool to demonstrate and explain the skills of stance and balance, pivoting, edging, and pressure.

Guiding.

- Guiding from the front, skiing backwards. Great for teaching beginners as good voice/sound contact can be maintained. Have a second instructor watch your back to avoid obstacles or collision.





- Guiding from the side is useful for students with some peripheral vision and allows you to watch the student and where you are going. Be careful not to collide with your student.

- Guiding from behind, is good for watching the student, the obstacles/crowds ahead, and allows your voice to be heard.

- Guiding using teaching tools such as poles “horse and buggy”, or waist harness with tethers to direct the student and control speed.

- Guiding from the front skiing forward is useful for students with some vision and more advanced skiers. You must turn your head over your shoulder to project your voice.

LESSON ONE EQUIPMENT

Terrain: Best done inside our Room.

Skill development: Stance and Balance

Teaching tips, drills and exercises

- "Show the student” the equipment by feeling the buckles on the boots, the bindings, the poles, skis and the edges (warning of sharp edges).



- Explain and demonstrate how each item works by having the student get in and out of their bindings. Place the pole straps on the wrists.

- Introduce stance and balance by moving the student's body (hands on with permission) into the correct balanced stance. Natural athletic stance, flexed ankles, knees, hips centered over the feet, hands forward and head up.

Tools: none

LESSON TWO WALKING SLIDING CLIMBING

Terrain: Flat. Use the area skier's right of the closest Carpet Lift. Just out our door is also useful. To get to the first Carpet terrain consider departing from the Marmot Level or even the main level of the Lodge thus avoiding the steep/slippery banks between our Room and suitable terrain.

Skill Development: Stance and Balance, pivoting, edging, pressure.

Teaching Tips, Drills, and Exercises:

- Walk around on boots, walk and slide on one ski, change direction (do a circle) on one ski. Do the same on two skis. Glide on the flats using the poles to push along.

- Practice side step, form a wedge, do a herring bone climb.

- Rising after a fall. Skis across the fall line, push up with uphill arm. Take skis off if necessary.

- Focus on developing good balance, and body position. Hands on (with permission) as necessary.

- Remember to use the communication and guiding techniques agreed with your student.

Magic Carpet Lift:

- Describe the lift; tell the student what they will experience.

- One instructor must ride with the student on the carpet. The instructor rides the lift with their skis off; hands on the student, helping the student anticipate the movement of the carpet, and compensating for any loss of balance. Walk off beside your student at the off-load.

Chair Lift:

- Describe the lift; tell the student what they will experience.

- Move through the normal lift lines with an instructor on both sides of the student. Explain the lift, the gates, how the chair will come behind, the commands "3, 2, 1, sit", "3, 2, 1, stand up", "ski away".

- Use a slow load and unload or full stop if necessary.

Tools: None

LESSON THREE STRAIGHT RUNNING, BRAKING

Terrain: Gentle slope with a run out is ideal. Stay in the area skier's right of the closest magic carpet.

Skills Development: Stance and balance, pivoting, edging, pressure

Teaching Tips, Drills, and Exercises:

- Starting from a good balanced athletic stance, skis shoulder width apart, head up, glide down the fall line coming to a natural terrain stop, gentle tether stop, or instructor in front stop.

- Straight run with wedge brake stop.

- Straight run skis parallel, change to wedge, change back to parallel



- Consider hands on knees to maintain a balanced stance on both skis.

- As your student becomes more comfortable increase the length and speed of the straight run. Practice flexing (bending ankles and knees) and extending keeping head up. No stooping or excessive bending forward at the waist.

Tools: Ankle tethers (keep line straight), waist tethers, pole.

LESSON FOUR FIRST TURNS, WEDGE TURN, BRAKING, STOPPING

Terrain: Gentle slope either side of the closest carpet lift. Depending on how well your student is doing, you may continue down-slope to the lower three carpet lifts. The terrain between the upper and lower carpets (left and right) would be the best. If this terrain proves too challenging for your student move back to the previous terrain where your student was most comfortable and had success.

Skills Development: Stance and balance, timing and coordination, pivoting, edging, pressure control.

Teaching Tips, Drills, and Exercises:

- From straight run, skis wide parallel or wedge make small turns back and forth across the fall line.

- From straight run, form wedge or wide track parallel, make a turn by turning feet, knees, in direction of turn to a stop. Repeat and practice turn to the opposite side.

- Try having the student put hands on the knees throughout the turn (stance, pivoting) or both hands on the knee which is on the outside of the turn (stance, pressure).



- Practice traversing both directions and turning into the hill to a stop. Fan progression.

- Mileage/practice.



Tools: Pole; tethers from bra, ankles, waist/hips; spreader bar, two point hold, horse and buggy; ski pole/bra instructor in front assist.

LESSON FIVE LINKED TURNS, WEDGE SERPENTINE, PARALLEL

Terrain: Green runs. Use all the carpets, both sides including the Green Loop. Do not move to steeper terrain too quickly. Reinforce success on easier terrain. Remember, move back to terrain where your student was comfortable if the new terrain is too challenging for your student. The fear factor inhibits learning.

Skills Development. Stance and balance, timing and coordination, pivoting, edging, and pressure. The technical goal is to develop a centred and mobile stance so as to be able to steer the skis using the lower body and to develop balance on the edge of the outside ski.

Teaching, Tips, Drills, and Exercises.

- Use consistent verbal commands and demonstrate using, “Hands On”. Consider drawing pictures with your finger of turn shape or serpentine turns on your students back. Use your hands to put the student’s body in the correct position and explain what you are doing.

- Practice uphill turns. Fan progression.

- Practice Serpentine linked wedge turns crossing the fall line. Let the skis run together (parallel) between turns.

- Practice Serpentine wide track linked turns with little or no wedge.

- Practice traversing with side slip. Engaging and releasing the edges

- Practice side slipping down the fall line.

- Practice falling leaf side slipping. Lean forward and back. Feel the difference.

- Practice skating on the flats.

- Introduce pole plant.

- **The Basic Parallel Turn.** From a traverse, extend (rise) slightly to flatten the skis, turn feet and legs into the turn transferring pressure (weight) to the outside ski. Flex (sink) and continue steering the feet and legs, engaging the edges to turn completion. Repeat.

- The most common problems you will encounter with your student are a stiff stance that is too far back and turning with the upper body. The twisting of the shoulders causes the skier to lean into the hill. The resulting poor balance on the downhill ski makes it difficult to create a good grip and control of direction. Having the student touch their knee(s) and keep the shoulders parallel with the slope may help.

- Mileage. Practice a variety of turn shapes, try different terrain, vary speed, and faster turns.

Tools: Most teaching tools should be faded away for this lesson. However consider spacer bar, tire inner tube around the hips, or horse and buggy.

LESSON SIX PARALLEL TURNS TO ADVANCED SKIING

Terrain: Blue runs. Hawk or Eagle. If too challenging for the student go back to terrain where you last had success. Explore the mountain.

Skills: Stance and Balance, Timing and Coordination, Pivoting, Edging, Pressure.

Teaching Tips, Drills, and Exercises:

- Link parallel turns with pole touch, touching toward the centre of the turn. More active and dynamic steering of the feet.

- Greater separation between upper and lower body. More active countering and carving turns.

- Hop turns

- Skate on a slight downhill slope.

- Ski in the bumps. Turn on top of bumps, turn between bumps.

- Ski in different snow conditions, off the groomers, powder, bumps, crud.

- Ski a human slalom or race course.

- Set challenges. Ski aggressively, ski safe, ski lots, have fun.

Tools: Set a slalom course using stubbies or cones from our room.