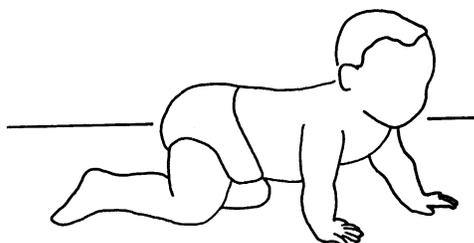
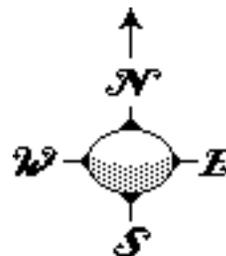


## Orientation and Mobility: What does it mean for my baby?

By Andrea Story, teacher of the visually impaired and O & M instructor

As parents learn about the services for their child with a vision impairment they soon hear of the sometimes hard to come by *orientation and mobility instructor*. What is this specialist that is known by yet another abbreviation, “O&M?” Oats and Mush? Maybe it’s a chant for yoga?

Orientation and Mobility is special training to help a person with vision impairment get from one place to another as safely, efficiently and independently as possible. **Orientation** refers to the many thinking skills needed to understand that there is a world at arms reach and beyond. It is also the know-how to get to the places one wants to go. For a baby, orientation may mean knowing where to reach out to touch a toy or dad’s cell phone. A toddler may use orientation to get to the cookie jar (or the dog’s water bowl) from any room in the house, and an older person may use it to know when it is safe to cross a street and what direction to continue after crossing.



**Mobility** is the actual moving skills that a person uses to get places. Depending on the individual, mobility could mean reaching, crawling, walking or using a wheel chair.

O&M training is a relatively young field that was formalized after World War II. At the time, a primary focus was teaching young men who had been blinded in the war how to use a long cane. In the 1960’s universities began training curriculums for O & M instructors. Generally Orientation and Mobility can be a part of a rehabilitation degree or part of a degree in education. Until the 1980’s O & M instruction was reserved for adults and school-age children. Realizing that preschool children could also benefit from special attention to the areas of navigating without sight there was a push to serve this age group as well as those with additional impairments.

The field of Orientation and Mobility continues to grow to address such topics as how to encourage a baby to explore, what is a good “pre-cane” tool and when to introduce a cane. As in any group there are disagreements within the field and with the philosophy and techniques are adjusted as knowledge is gained.

In some instances an O & M instructor may work directly with a child and in other situations the O & M instructor may teach the skills to the family and/or others (such as the teacher of the visually impaired, physical therapist, occupational therapist, day care

provider, etc.). Consulting may be very effective when others already see a toddler on a regular basis such as a teacher of the visually impaired and/or a physical therapist. If a teacher of the visually impaired is involved he or she is more than likely working on many of the thinking and moving skills that an O & M instructor would focus on for a baby or toddler. What is important is making sure the area of navigating oneself is considered and expertise is used.