

Visual Impairment



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What is visual impairment?

There are 2 million people with sight problems in the UK and this covers a range from someone who would not pass the sight component of the driving test or would not be able to read standard print/recognise a friend across the street all the way through to people who are registered blind. This information helps to dispel the myth that blindness means not seeing anything at all.

Along with the range of sight impairments there are also a range of causes, for example, some people have blindness or partial sight from birth, some develop it as part of another condition and some through illness. Accidents can also result in loss of sight.

Being partially sighted can mean distorted vision, an inability to distinguish between shapes or colours and blurred sight.

Living with visual impairment

Most of us have a degree of partial sight that in many cases is overcome by wearing glasses or contact lenses. However, a number of people have more specific or profound difficulties with sight.

Problems can be encountered within the areas of literacy, understanding, and communication. This can unfortunately lead to a number of other problems such as teasing by others and related behavioural traits.

Some young people with blindness or partial sight may need to attend a special school or unit. Others may have a different form of provision, such as large print books or a specialist teacher.

Special schools usually have a wide catchment area and individuals often travel away from their own neighbourhood in order to attend. Scouting offers an opportunity to make friends close to home that might otherwise not exist.

Where sudden loss of sight occurs, a great deal of support will be needed especially during the period of 'coming to terms' with blindness or partial sight..

Practical Tips

You will have to consider a range of ways of explaining activities or giving instructions.

An individual with a visual impairment relies heavily on their memory and mental images of their surroundings. You will need to inform them of any changes of position of large objects at your meeting place, and to arrange a guided walk around new venues for those with severe visual loss.

There are a variety of aids available, such as magnifying lenses, large print publications, Braille transcriptions, audio descriptions, electronic reading aids and screen readers.

During many activities verbal clues and a 'running commentary' from a friend will be necessary. This will include important information such as directions and obstacles, e.g. steps and slopes.

Producing aids as a part of your programme will ensure that they are not only available but also relevant to the particular individual and their needs.

What else do I need to know?

Particular attention needs to be paid to safety wherever you are. Remember that any simple obstacle at ground level can be dangerous if you fall over it. The tidiness of your meeting place is very important.

The vast majority of people with sight problems are aged over 65. With this being so, you may need to think about ways in which you communicate to parents and other leaders.

Find out if there are any specialist aids available, e.g. a Braille compass, which could be used in Scouting activities.

Further Information

Discuss with the individual and/or their parents the extent to which help is needed and learn any practical tips they have to offer.

If special educational provisions have been made for the individual ask for permission to approach the school or college involved for any further tips they may have.

Visual/ Sensory impairment services: contact your local Education Department office and ask for information.

Social Services Rehabilitation Officer for the visual impaired: contact your local Social Services.

Support Organisations

Action for Blind People

14-16 Verney Road
London
SE16 3DZ
Telephone: 020 7635 4800
Fax: 020 7635 4900
Email: info@actionforblindpeople.org.uk
Website: www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Look

(The National Federation of Families with Visually Impaired Children)
C/O Queen Alexandra College
49 Court Oak Road
Haborne
Birmingham
B17 9TG
Telephone: 0121 428 5038
Email: admin@look-uk.org
Web Site: www.look-uk.org

Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)

105 Judd Street
London
WC1H 9NE
Helpline: 0845 766 9999
Fax: 020 7388 2034
Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk
Website: www.rnib.org.uk