

Early Years Advice and Guidance **Vision Friendly Settings: Adaptations and Strategies**

Vision Friendly Settings: Adaptations and Strategies

Identification

Vision impairment (VI) refers to medical conditions that result in reduced vision through to blindness occurring from birth or at any time. A 'vision impairment' can include difficulties throughout the visual system including the eye itself, the optic pathways and/or parts of the brain.

A child/young person (CYP) can be considered to have a VI if their visual condition interferes with optimal development, learning and achievements, unless adaptations are made in the methods of presenting learning experiences, the nature of the materials used and/or the learning environment. This definition includes children and young people with other disabilities/impairments in addition to VI, including those with profound and complex needs. NB The term 'learning' includes not just academic learning but the acquisition of mobility, independent living and social skills that in the case of a CYP with VI may be provided through habilitation teaching.

Vision impairment can impact on all areas of learning and development (80% of learning occurs through the eyes). CYP with vision impairment are usually identified by local Ophthalmology departments/Paediatricians and referred directly to the Low Incidence Needs Team. The specialist support and intervention offered is based on an Eligibility Framework.

Degrees of vision impairment:

The following classification applies to corrected vision with both eyes open.

Mild vision loss	Within the range 6/12 - 6/18 Snellen/Kay (LogMAR 0.3 – 0.48) Near: N14-18
Moderate vision loss	Less than 6/18 - 6/36 Snellen/Kay (LogMAR 0.5 – 0.78) Near: N18-24
Severe vision loss	Less than 6/36 - 6/60 Snellen/Kay (LogMAR 0.8 – 1.00) Near: N24-36
Profound vision loss	Less than 6/60 Snellen/Kay (LogMAR 1.02)

NB: *These degrees of vision impairment are not appropriate for CYP with Cerebral Vision Impairment (CVI). Acuity criteria are for guidance purposes only. The professional judgement of the Qualified Teacher of the Vision Impaired (QTVI) should be applied as necessary to decide on the classification. Depending on the severity, age and level of development of the CYP, alternative assessments may be used to identify level of need.*

Key things to remember

- Support and advice should be obtained from the local authority Low Incidence Needs team (LINT) – Vision Impairment.
- The child is first and foremost a child whose development will be individual no matter what level of vision impairment.
- Vision is the major source of information. It stimulates curiosity, integrates information and invites exploration.
- Higher skills in the use of the other senses do not automatically develop to compensate for the lack of sight. They develop through experience, practice and supported learning.
- Learning through senses other than vision can be slower and may be incomplete; it cannot always provide all the necessary information in order to ensure an accurate understanding of people, places and objects in the child's environment.
- Lack of sight can have a profound effect on the child's ability to interact socially. Social clues such as body language, gesture, eye contact, or facial expressions may be missed or misunderstood, and alternative ways of reading other people's feelings and non-verbal communication needs to be actively taught.
- A child's confidence is influenced by their ability to be independent in both their learning and in everyday routines.

The Transition Process

It is important that the child becomes confident within the new environment as soon as possible (either arriving into nursery or moving on). The LINT qualified teacher for vision impairment (QTVI) and Habilitation Specialist will support you and the child with this. There should be opportunities and time to:

- Visit as soon as a new environment is identified
- Meet key staff
- Initiate and develop orientation and mobility skills (this may include guidance from the Habilitation Specialist RQHS)
- Become familiar with the physical layout of the building/classroom and the routines and procedures of the day including lunch arrangements
- Identify appropriate storage of equipment and ensure child is aware of location
- Environmental assessment (if appropriate) to ensure safety and accessibility
- Make necessary adaptations in terms of building, lighting and external areas should have been made
- Complete risk assessments and procedures in relation to particular events such as fires and the safety of the child

The Physical Environment

How can you aim to make the physical environment more accessible for a child with a vision impairment?

Lighting:

Should be:

- As consistent as possible throughout the building
- Good quality, even and without glare
- Controllable, with blinds for natural light and dimmer switches for artificial light

Colour:

- Surfaces are painted with a matt finish to avoid glare. Pale colours are preferable
- Walls are contrasted to floors
- Door frames are painted in a contrasting colour to the walls
- Door handles are a contrasting colour to the door
- Floors are plain with a non-glare surface

Signage and displays:

- Well lit – without glare
- Simple and colour contrasted to the background e.g. black on white, black on yellow
- Positioned at child eye level

Physical Access:

Does the setting allow children to be independent? Consider:

- Stairs and steps
- Changes in level
- Doorways
- Cloakrooms, bathrooms and toilets
- Teaching areas
- Communal areas
- Pathways
- Storage areas

Do they have evenly diffused lighting, hand rail that is colour contrasted to the wall, highlighted step edges, uneven surface and ramps clearly defined?

Fixtures and Fittings:

Try to ensure that:

- Furniture is matt finished and contrasts with its surroundings
- Storage areas are clearly labelled in an appropriate format
- Flooring such as mats are a contrasting colour to the background (and are held securely)
- Coat pegs are a contrasting colour with uncluttered access
- Bins and other obstacles are clearly marked or put away (avoid clutter)
- Children are told of any changes to the physical environment

The Inclusive Curriculum

Every child with a vision impairment will have different needs, but they should have access to the same broad and balanced curriculum.

Classroom management:

Think ACCESS

A – appropriate seating position for group work and carpet time

C – clear and clutter free

C – contrast

E – easy to locate

S – spacing

S – size and style

A Appropriate seating position –

- Most (but not all) children with vision impairment benefit from sitting close to the focus of the activity
- Do not sit the child facing a window
- The child may need to move around the setting freely to position themselves in the best place to view an activity
- If a child needs specialist IT to magnify toys, books and activities they may need to have this set up near a plug socket.

C Clear and clutter free –

- Keep any print neat and of good quality
- Use a simple font such as comic sans or Sassoon for labels
- Pictures may need to be enlarged and modified

C Contrast -

- Ensure white boards are clean and use a black marker
- Use a contrasting background for visual demonstrations
- Fibre tipped pens give better contrast than crayons or coloured pencils

E Easy to locate –

- Make sure toys and activities are kept in the same place
- Keep the classroom area layout the same
- Keep the classroom tidy

S Spacing –

- Space makes things more visible
- Consider the spacing of words in books

S Size or style –

- Ensure print on labels and in books is easy for the child to see

* Remember that braille or large print may be required, please ask your specialist LINT teacher for advice.

Teaching Strategies

A child with a vision impairment may miss incidental learning opportunities and visual clues such as body language, gestures and facial expression.

They may require a; multi-sensory approach, more frequent adult intervention, differentiated activities specific to the child's visual needs, opportunities for first-hand experiences and handling of real objects, extra time to explore objects/activities and complete tasks.

Structured approaches to develop listening skills

- Always use the child's name first to gain attention.
 - Children with a vision impairment respond better within a consistent routine in a well-planned environment.
 - Words describing visual functions should be used routinely, for example "Look at me" "Shall we see if there are any bigger bricks?"
 - Opportunities for spontaneous play with sensitive support will be an essential way of learning for a young child with vision impairment.
 - Take account of the child's individual needs regarding lighting and sound levels as advised by the LINT qualified specialist teacher.
 - The early years setting is likely to be an unfamiliar environment to a new child. The child will need to build up their own mental map at their own pace. Build confidence and understanding by:
 - providing a quiet home-base in the setting where the child feels safe.
 - encouraging the child to move out from there when ready, learning key routes.
 - showing the child what is available within the setting on a daily basis.
 - encouraging the child to have a go at something new and build on success.
- actively and confidently exploring the inside and outside areas.

Play and Active Learning

Toys and play materials are an important way of enabling children to discover a variety of sensory experiences.

- Give children plenty of time to explore new things.
- All children need opportunities to experience challenge, risk and excitement in a way that is appropriate for them.
- It is essential to watch and listen to a child's reactions to work out what stimulates and interests them and what they enjoy.
- Children need to be alert to play and enjoy new things. If they are tired or unwell try less demanding or familiar activities.
- Children depend on a sensitive play partner to encourage, support and extend their play with objects – and to know when to withdraw!
- Ask the LINT specialist teacher about colour, contrast, lighting, and using plain backgrounds. Try to find out if the child sees better on one side, or if objects should be presented in a particular position.
- Make sure that the child is in the most suitable position to use their hands and eyes to best advantage, whether seated, standing or lying.
- Define and limit the play space around the child to create a "den" or secure familiar base to play and for sensory breaks.
- Keep toys within easy reach so that the child's movements can create an effect. For example, suspend toys above babies who are lying down, or use a container to keep objects together on a tabletop.
- If objects roll out of reach, try to take the child to the object, rather than bringing the object back to the child.
- Allow a child to explore objects with their mouth and feet, if appropriate, as well as encouraging the use of hands.

- Use language that is simple, short and descriptive and relates to what the child is doing.
- All children need opportunities to explore and play outdoors and some may need encouragement to do so.

Choosing toys

Key things to remember:

- Good colour and tone contrast.
- Any lettering is bold and clear.
- Reflects light or is fluorescent.
- Encourages children to use their eyes to follow an object.
- Encourages development of hand-eye co-ordination.
- Encourages good co-ordination of hands, using both hands together.
- Encourages development of fine finger control.
- Has an interesting texture offering some variety to touch.
- Has moving parts.
- Discrete pieces can be discriminated by touch.
- Switches are recognisable by touch as on or off, and click when operated.

Specialist Equipment:

It is important that the setting provides storage that is safe and that children have independent access to storage of their specialist equipment such as low vision aids, CCTV, tactile equipment.

Educational Visits:

When planning trips consider the following –

- Is there a risk assessment completed with the child's vision difficulties in mind?
- Would it be beneficial to contact the venue to arrange better access e.g. touching the animals/exhibits?
- Is additional support required for safety?

The Social Curriculum:

It is an expectation that all children with vision impairment are included in the whole life of the nursery/EY setting.

Enhancing self-esteem –

- Encourage independence.
- Discover, recognise and reward the child's strengths.
- Provide opportunities for choices and decision making.
- Ensure print is accessible and in an appropriate format e.g. wall displays, certificates.
- Encourage peers to show interest in and experience any specialist equipment to help make it the 'norm'.

Facilitating friendships –

- Provide access to all shared activities (with support if required).
- Peer awareness sessions can be delivered by the child's specialist teacher
- Ensure children with vision impairment are made aware of what is acceptable/ appropriate behaviour and body language.

Communicating Meaning –

- Say the child's name first to gain their attention.
- Read out any written words.
- Describe activities verbally.
- Spontaneous laughter and disturbances need explaining.
- Check understanding through careful questioning.
- If necessary, remind the child to locate and turn towards the speaker.
- Keep language simple, clear and meaningful.

**If you need further advice, please contact the
Low Incidence Needs Team (Vision Impairment)**

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