

**Information sheet for parents/carers**

**Visual Impairment Service**

A guide to visual impairment and support we offer

This information sheet introduces the Visual Impairment Service and the support that we offer. There are also details of other support you can expect for a child with a visual impairment, along with tips on how to support a child through play.

# Who do we support?

The Visual Impairment Service provides support to children, young people (and their families) diagnosed with or suspected to have a visual impairment.

It is important that we see children at an early age if a visual impairment is suspected. Early educational input is especially important for children with visual impairments who are not able to experience the world around them, as sighted children will do. Our intervention at an early stage in the child’s development can help to reduce problems caused by a visual impairment.

# Services on offer from the Visual Impairment Service

# Toddler group

We host a Baby and Toddler Group for children with visual impairments. Sessions are usually held on the last Friday of the month at Stourbridge Family and Children Centre, Forge Road, Stourbridge. Parents, carers and siblings are all very welcome. For more details please call 01384 818003.

**Home visits**

Home visits form an important part of our role, they are provided by us to support families to meet and understand their child’s visual needs. We use a range of specialist tools to assess vision and help advise and reassure parents on; methods of play, adaptations to resources, tactile skills and development. Families are supported and signposted to additional services including; charities, libraries and groups. Early intervention is the key to helping families to understand and adapt to their child’s visual needs. We visit families of very young children, or children who are not in full time education.

## Educational settings

In nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, advice, information and support are provided to pupils and staff by a Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired. Pupils attend local schools wherever possible supported by our service. All colleges and Sixth Forms in Dudley Borough also provide access to students with a visual impairment.

## Habilitation (Orientation, Mobility and Independent Living Skills)

Orientation and mobility training are very important to every visually impaired child to help them develop skills to enable them to move around safely and independently.

In Dudley these skills are taught by a Qualified Habilitation Specialist, who can assess the needs of the child and devise an individual programme appropriate to that child’s age and ability.

For a programme to be effective the time spent with an individual child is flexible, lessons cannot always be confined to daylight hours within term time. It must be ‘on going’ and, when appropriate, to include training around the child’s immediate home area.

A very important part of training is road safety; the visually impaired child will need to be able to negotiate his/ her environment safely and confidently. Routes from home to local areas and routes to and from school, will be taught at an appropriate age.

Regular liaison with parents/carers is very important and each stage of the child’s mobility programme will be discussed. For example, the introduction of a long cane or sighted guidance (where a sighted person acts as a guide) may be discussed at an appropriate time, if required. It is important that parents/carers follow any advice given by the Habilitation Specialist and support the training at home when required.

Daily living skills are also considered an important part of independence training and a typical syllabus would include kitchen skills and self-care which again will be tailored to the individual child.

The Habilitation Specialist’s role also includes ‘awareness’ sessions within school so that staff can be sensitive to the needs and difficulties experienced by the visually impaired children.

The Habilitation Specialist will also complete environmental audits of the child’s setting where necessary and advise on risk assessments.

## ICT Specialist (Typing and Keyboard Skills)

Touch typing, keyboard skills including keyboard/Word shortcuts can be taught to pupils with a visual impairment following an assessment by a Qualified ICT Specialist in collaboration with a QTVI.

Touch typing skills enables children to key-in text without looking at the keys and produce text that their class teacher, their peers and most importantly themselves can read (this can help with revision for exams etc.) Touch typing enables children who are blind to produce a printed copy of work for marking. Instruction is also given on accessing large print, magnification facilities (i.e. large print software, other specialist software) and using the keys instead of the mouse to select items from the menus.

Other equipment (e.g. Electronic braille notetakers, laptop computer, tablet (e.g. iPad) may be provided if it is found to be a necessary aid for schoolwork.

The aim of teaching touch typing and other ICT skills (e.g. screen readers which translate on-screen information into speech) is to enable independence in the classroom and in the future workplace.

## Resources

The service provides a wide variety of resources and specialist equipment for children with a visual impairment to access in school.

* Books, worksheets and examination papers are modified (enlarged or provided in braille). Print is produced in the style and size appropriate for the individual pupil.
* Diagrams, maps and graphs are enlarged, simplified or modified. These can also be produced in tactile form.
* Specialist equipment, i.e. video magnifiers, talking calculators,
* Advice can be given about sloping desktops and book stands to help improve body posture.
* Information Technology: specialist software is available to enhance the screen and provide speech.

# Helping your child learn through play

A child is doing far more than just enjoying themselves when playing with toys - they are learning to make sense of their world

Children with a visual impairment often use sensory exploration with their; mouth, tongue and lips to feel shapes and texture. Once their touch is more developed, they will use their fingers more.

When buying toys try to make sure that:

* The toy does something - does it make a noise or have parts that move (but will not come off into the child’s mouth)?
* Is it easy to manipulate?
* Is it interesting to touch?

Homemade toys can be just as good as shop bought ones, for example:

* Empty containers to shake, filled with pasta, rice, cornflakes, etc.
* A ‘feely’ board or blanket covered with different textures - leather, sandpaper, tin foil, bubble wrap, shells and beads.
* Household items such as clothes pegs, wooden spoons to bang on saucepans, different containers in a bowl of water.

It is important to play with your child and talk to them about what is happening around them, sing them nursery rhymes and action songs.

# Getting your young child used to the world around them

* During all these activities, talk to your child and explain what you are about to do.
* Help your child to be aware of their own body – by stroking, touching or blowing on different body parts. Massaging hands, arms and legs with baby oil, talc or cream helps your child become aware of their own body, as well as being reassuring and calming.
* Let your child feel movement in a swinging chair or lift them up in a blanket with someone else’s help.
* Play games with your child on your lap - bouncing, rocking, clapping hands, singing rhymes etc.
* Allow your child to play independently in a safe environment, such as a playpen or large cardboard box with toys of different textures.
* Put your child on the carpet on a sheet of rustly paper so that they can hear their movements. Allowing your child to lie or sit on other surfaces such as grass, sand or a soft duvet also allows them to experience different environments.
* Taking your child into different rooms lets them learn about sounds and smells, for example, the sound of the television, washing machine, vacuum cleaner or the bath filling with water. Talk to them about everything that is around them.
* Let your child feel lots of different textures, soft toys, bricks, bean bags, a musical ball, wooden spoon or anything which they can handle safely.
* Share books with your child, these can have tactile or auditory elements. Noisy books can be a great source of fun and information about the world around them.
* Talking to and providing verbal cues about the things that they are experiencing.

# Developing your child’s vision

If your child has some vision it may be developed by some of the following activities:

* Show them black and white pictures or black and white patterns.
* Use light-up toys in a low-lit room.
* Let them look closely at your face, making sure that you are sitting in a well-lit position. Ensure the light is not behind you as this will make your face will be more difficult to see. Give them pictures of faces to look at.
* Put toys onto a plain, contrasting background so that they stand out. Make sure the toys are brightly coloured.
* Mirrors or shiny paper can be put onto a black background. These could be stuck around a small child’s cot or made into a mobile to hang over the bed.

# Using all the senses

Encourage your child to **look** by giving them bright, colourful toys or shiny objects. Torches and lights in a darkened room also stimulate children to use their vision.

Encourage your child to **listen** by giving toys that make interesting sounds and music. Fasten small bells around their wrists and ankles so that they learn that their own movements can make sounds.

Develop your child’s sense of **smell** by using different scented soaps in the bath. Let them experience different smells of food and drink. Talk to your child about these various smells

**Touch** is a very important to develop as it helps your child find out about their world. Make sure they feel secure, then give them a variety of toys and objects to hold and explore. Brush your child’s skin with different soft brushes and textures and puff air onto their skin and see if they like it. Vibrating toys can encourage your child to reach out and touch.

# Professionals who may see your child

**Ophthalmologist** - a specialist in eye conditions usually based at a Hospital or Eye Infirmary

**Orthoptist** - works with the ophthalmologist to assess eyesight and advise on magnification, if required.

**Optometrist** - the person who will examine your child’s eye to identify defects of vision and signs of disease. They will prescribe, fit and supply spectacles and various vision aids to correct sight.

**Qualified Teacher of Children with a Visual Impairment** - gives advice and support in the home, nurseries, schools and colleges.

**Physiotherapist** - helps with physical development and gives advice on positioning, posture, seating and other specialised equipment.

**Occupational Therapist** - advises on your child’s sensory awareness and development of appropriate physical skills.

**Speech and Language Therapist** - advises on developing communication and feeding difficulties.

**Paediatrician** - a specialist in child health and is usually based at a hospital or child development centre.

**Specialist Health Visitor** - a trained nurse who will check on general health and development.

**Senior Medical Officer** - a doctor who is trained in the development of young children and is usually based at your local clinic.

# Useful vocabulary

**Accommodation** Ability of the eye to focus on near and distant objects

**Binocular vision** Ability to use both eyes together to focus on objects

**Congenital** Present at birth

**Depth perception** Ability to see where objects are in space (3D vision)

**Depth vision** Ability to view objects at a distance

**Field of vision** All that you can see in front and around you without moving your eyes

**Habilitation** Mobility, orientation and daily living skills

**In focus** If an object is in focus it is seen very clearly

**Light adaptation** Ability of the eyes to adjust to more or less light

**Light perception** Ability to distinguish light from dark

**Near perception** Ability to see objects clearly close up

**Optic atrophy** Optic nerve fibres carry visual information from the retina to the brain. If these are reduced in size, they cannot do their job properly this results in hazy indistinct images being seen

**Peripheral vision** Side vision rather than central vision

**Photophobia** Abnormal sensitivity to light

**Retina** Delicate lining at the back of the eye that receives visual information then

transmitted to the brain via the optic nerve

**Visual acuity** Sharpness and clarity of vision

**Visual cortex** The part of the brain that sorts out visual information received by eyes

**Cortical or cerebral** A visual impairment associated with a neurological problem.

**visual impairment**

# Associations and support groups

Web Pages of national charities providing help, support and information for visually impaired people:

Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) - [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

Victa - <https://www.victa.org.uk/> provides grants for purchasing assistive technology

Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC) - [www.rsbc.org.uk](http://www.rsbc.org.uk)

Family Fund - <https://www.familyfund.org.uk/> - grants for low-income families with a disabled or seriously

ill children

Blind in Business - [www.blindinbusiness.org.uk](http://www.blindinbusiness.org.uk)

Look UK - [www.look-uk.org](http://www.look-uk.org)

Sense - [www.sense.org.uk](http://www.sense.org.uk) supporting people who are deafblind

New life - <https://newlifecharity.co.uk/> - not specifically VI but for disabled children.

Cerebra - <https://cerebra.org.uk/> - supporting children with brain conditions, with a sensory toy library