



Visual impairment support

A guide to visual impairment and the visual impairment service

About this fact sheet

This fact sheet provides an introduction to 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?

Our service provides support to children (and their families) diagnosed with, or suspected to have a visual impairment.

It is important that we see children suspected to have a visual impairment at as early an age as possible. Early educational input is especially important for visually impaired children 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.

Services on offer from the visual impairment service

Education

We can give advice about the types of educational provision available across Dudley Borough, available for children and young people with a visual impairment.

Pre-school

Pre-school children with a visual impairment can be visited in their homes regularly by visiting teachers of the visually impaired and specialist teaching assistants. On entry to playgroup or nursery a teacher of the visually impaired can provide advice and support to parents and the setting.

We host a Baby and Toddler Group for visually impaired children. Sessions are held on the last Friday of the month at Stourbridge Family and Children Centre, Forge Rd, Stourbridge, parents, carers and siblings are all very welcome. For more details please call 01384 818003.

Primary and secondary

In mainstream and special primary and secondary schools advice and support can be provided by a visiting teacher of the visually impaired. Pupils attend local schools wherever possible supported by our service. Support in the classroom can also be provided by a specialist teaching assistant if appropriate.

Special schools

Advice and support is provided by a teacher of the visually impaired. In certain cases there is specialist one to one teaching. Children who are deaf and blind are supported by an intervenor (deafblind communicator)

Further Education

There are specialist colleges located outside Dudley Borough which provide both day and residential facilities for students with a visual impairment. All mainstream colleges in Dudley Borough provide access to students with a visual impairment but may not all provide specialist advice or support

There are also specialist schools and colleges for children and young people with a visual impairment, which are located in various parts of the country.

Orientation and mobility

Orientation and mobility training is 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 mobility instructor 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 be confined to daylight hours within term time. It has to be 'on going' and when appropriate and to include work around the child's immediate home area.

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

Close liaisons with parents are very important and all stages of your child's mobility programme will be discussed with you.

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 structured to the individual child.

The mobility instructor's role also includes 'awareness' sessions within school so that staff can be sensitive to the needs and difficulties experienced by the visually impaired student.

Typing and Keyboard Skills

Touch typing/keyboard skills can be taught to pupils with a visual impairment following an assessment by a qualified typing/keyboard tutor. This may be applicable for children from the age of eight.

For pupils who are visually impaired this skill enables them to key-in text without looking at the keys and produce text that their class teacher, their peers and most importantly themselves can read (helps with revision for exams etc). Touch typing enables pupils who are blind to produce a print copy. 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.

With IT being continually developed and an important part of the national curriculum, this specialised training helps the visually impaired pupil access this technology.

Specialist equipment (e.g. adapted keyboard word processor, laptop computer) may be provided if found to be a necessary aid for schoolwork.

The aim is for the pupil/student to be independent in producing legible work in the same time as his/her peers without the stress of concentrating on writing for long periods of time.

Useful resources

The service provides a wide variety of resources and specialist equipment for all children with a visual impairment.

Books, worksheets and examination papers are enlarged or modified. 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.

- There is a selection of large print novels available.
- There is a wide selection of audio materials in the form of fiction and non-fiction.
- Print is transcribed into braille and provided in the form of books or worksheets.
- There is a selection of special graph paper and dark lined paper.
- Information Technology: specialist software to enhance the screen and give speech.
- There is a wide selection of toys which are particularly good for visual stimulation exercises.

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 carry on mouthing toys and using their tongue and lips to feel shapes and textures when other children may have stopped, this should cause no concern and 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 toys brought from a shop for example:

- Empty containers to shake, filled with pasta, rice, cornflakes
- A 'feely' board covered with different textures - leather, sandpaper, tin foil, bubble wrap, shells, 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 and 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 both awareness for your child 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 to 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 play- pen or large cardboard box with toys of different textures.

- Put your child on the carpet on a sheet of rusty paper so that they can hear their movements, and 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 anything which they can handle safely.

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.
- Let them look closely at your face, making sure that you are sitting in a well lit position. 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: shiny paper can be cut out and stuck 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 of 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

Optometrist - is 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.

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

Orthoptist - works with the ophthalmologist

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

Physiotherapist - helps with physical development and give advise 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

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

Specialist Health Visitor - is 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
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

Associations and support groups

Please contact us for more details

- RNIB
- Dudley Disability Service - visual impairment team
- National Blind Children's Society
- LOOK National Federation of Families with Visually Impaired Children
- Beacon Centre for the Blind
- Action for Blind people
- OFFSIGHT
- The Halesowen Blind Association
- The Stourbridge Institution for the Blind
- Mary Stevens Resource Centre
- Contact a Family

More information

The visual impairment service is part of Dudley Disability Service. We are a team of qualified teachers of the visually impaired and specialist teaching assistants.

We provide advice and information to parents and teachers. We help teach and support children with a visual impairment of all ages and abilities. We also assess children's vision. In addition we support and advise on the use of specialist equipment and train in the use of low vision aids, provide Braille and enlarged or modified learning materials, provide training independence and mobility training and teach touch typing and specialist software. We will also liaise with other professionals such as social care, healthcare and RNIB

For further information or advice, please contact us at:

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