



Children and Young People's Services

Guide for Parents – Myths about Vision Impairment, Children and Young People

The term 'blind' means that someone cannot see anything - 'Blind' merely refers to a range of vision impairment. Only around 3% of people with vision impairment are said to see 'nothing'. This confusion has led to 'blind' being replaced with 'Severely Sight Impaired'. If your child/young person's level of vision falls within this range, then they will be certified/registered as 'Severely Sight Impaired'.

My child/young person will need an operation - Although some eye conditions require an operation, this is not true for many causes of vision impairment. You can find out more about whether your child/young person has an eye condition that may require an operation by talking to your Ophthalmologist (Eye Doctor) or other eye health professionals.

All children/young people with the same eye condition can see the same as each other - All eye conditions affect individuals differently. There are many variables; such as if the individual has other eye or health conditions; the severity of the condition i.e. does it affect one or both eyes, how aggressive it is; and if the individual was born with the condition (congenital) or if they developed it at a later date (acquired). Your Ophthalmologist (eye doctor) can help you understand how your child/young person's eye condition affects them and specialists such as QTVI's and Habilitation Specialists can assess how your child/young person uses their vision in everyday situations. This is known as a 'functional vision test'.

My child/young person's vision is always the same - There are many factors which can impact on how your child/young person appears to see the world around them. Tiredness and stress can often reduce your child/young person's ability to focus; different types of lighting can make seeing more difficult; some eye conditions cause vision to fluctuate. You can watch to see how your child/young person reacts in different conditions. A QTVI or Habilitation Specialist can help with this and finding out more about your child/young person's eye condition can give you an idea of how to help them get the most out of their vision.



My child/young person will see better in bright light- This is true for some eye conditions, however, for others bright lights can cause increased blurriness, glare and even pain. This is especially true for children/young people with photophobia (aversion to bright lights). It is important to find out how your child/young person's eye condition is affected by light to help them to use their vision effectively.

Children/young people with vision impairment need to wear dark glasses - Some children/young people with vision impairment will benefit from wearing dark or tinted glasses as it helps reduce glare and the effects of bright light. This is not true for all conditions. It is important to find out how your child/young person's eye condition is affected by light to help them to use their vision effectively.

My child/young person will need a Guide Dog - Relatively few people with vision impairment use a guide dog for a mobility aid. Some use a long white stick, known as a cane and others can get around safely with no mobility aid. Habilitation Specialists can help assess if your child/young person would benefit from a mobility aid.

People that are certified sight impaired/partially sighted cannot have a guide dog - Guide Dogs aren't just for people who are severely sight impaired/blind. You don't need to have lost all of your sight; most people who own a Guide Dog still have some vision. You don't have to be officially registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired either. If you feel your child/young person might benefit from a Guide Dog contact your local Guide Dogs team. You can find out who your local team are on the Guide Dogs web site. www.guidedogs.org.uk

My child/young person will need to learn braille - It is estimated around 1% of people with vision impairment read Brailleⁱⁱ. Although there are several reasons for this, it is often because many people with vision impairment are still able to read print, they may just have to use a different font or text size to access the information. A QTVI can help assess how to adapt reading materials for your child/young person. You can also access services such as CustomEyes which has a large selection of books which they can adapt to suit your child/young person's need.

My child/young person will need to attend a special school - 64% of children/young people with vision impairment aged 5-16 are educated in mainstream schoolsⁱⁱⁱ. Adaptations can be made to their learning environment and low vision aids and assistive technology can help them access learning. You can discuss your child/young person's options with a QTVI or an education specialist.



My child/young person will not be able to attend university - All Universities have a Student Support Team with specialists in vision or sensory loss that can help support your child/young person access learning at University. For those assessed to have a 'critical' need they can apply for the Disabled Student Allowance to cover costs of support and equipment.

You can find out more about this by talking to an Education Specialist.

My child/young person will not be able to do everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning or personal grooming - Having vision impairment should not prevent your child/young person from performing, age appropriate, everyday tasks. Children and young people can be taught to use their other senses, aids and technology to complete tasks. Try not to let your child/young person's vision impairment become an excuse for dependent living. If you are struggling, you can get support from a Habilitation specialist who can work with your child/young person to develop independent living skills.

Not being able to drive will prevent my child/young person from being independent - Although not being able to drive can be seen as a barrier, it doesn't mean your child/young person will not be able to access other modes of transport, such as buses and trains. Your local Council will provide bus passes for passengers with vision impairment and a disabled person's rail card is available for discounted train travel. Habilitation Specialists and mobility instructors can work with your child/young person to help them travel independently by teaching them to use mobility aids and orientation skills. There are passenger assistance services available at train stations and airports to support people to get on/off trains and planes. Many buses and local tram services are introducing audio announcements to let people know their stop. Changes in technology mean that there are several 'satellite navigation' devices and Apps which are designed for people with vision impairment to help them navigate when walking/travelling independently. You can speak to a Habilitation Specialist, mobility instructor or access technology expert for further information.

My child/young person will not be able to use a computer - People with vision impairment are able to access computers using assistive technology. If your child/young person has enough vision to read large print they can use a screen magnification programme, whereas children/young people that are unable to see enough to read can use a screen reader which converts text to speech. People with vision impairment often learn to touch type and this skill can help when using assistive technology. You can get advice on the range of assistive technology



available and which would be most suitable for your child/young person from our technology specialist.

My child/young person will need a carer - Although some people with vision impairment receive support for independent living there is no specific reason to have a 'carer' this is often down to choice, or other factors such as additional or complex needs.

My child/young person will not have the same job opportunities as other people - although there are some jobs that your child/young person will be unable to do; driver, surgeon, Armed Forces etc., most jobs are open to people with vision impairment. Government schemes such as 'Access to Work' help fund any adaptations or assistive technology your child/young person may require to help make the job accessible.

Terminology Key

Vision impairment - Throughout this document "vision impairment" will be used when referring to reduced or impaired vision.

QTVI - QTVI's, or Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired - work in partnership with schools to ensure the needs, of pupils with vision impairment, are fully met. They are specialists in assessing how a child/young person's vision impairment impacts on their learning.

Habilitation Specialists - These specialists can work with your child/young person to help with mobility, orientation and independent living skills.

Mobility Instructor - Similar to Habilitation Specialists but focus only on mobility and orientation.

For further support contact:

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