



DISABILITY FACT SHEET

Vision Impairment

Communication strategies

- When communicating with a person with a vision impairment it is important to acknowledge that each person is an individual and should be approached as such.
- Be aware that a person who is blind or vision impaired will be disadvantaged about knowing what is going on. Therefore describe what is happening. Do not leave people who are blind or vision impaired without telling them you are going.
- Remember the person can't see but they can hear perfectly well, so try not to speak loudly or slowly when communicating.
- When talking to a person with vision impairment don't stand with your back to a window as they will not be able to see you through the glare.
- Provide written material in at least a sixteen point font, particularly safety instructions. When choosing colours, look for good contrast, yellow on green or black on white, avoid instructions written in pale colours, avoid pastels.
- When giving directions use accurate and specific language. For example, ensure that your 'left and right' match their 'left and right'.

Disability Overview

There are many causes of vision impairment and each individual is affected differently.

An individual is considered legally blind if they:

- Cannot see at six metres what someone with normal vision can see at 60 metres.
- Their field of vision is less than 20 degrees in diameter rather than 180 degrees for a normal sighted person.

To be considered legally blind there must be no possibility of correcting a person's vision through treatment.

The term 'vision impaired' simply means an individual has some degree of sight loss. Some forms of vision impairment can be corrected through the use of glasses or contact lenses.

The four main eye conditions that lead to vision impairment include:

- Age-related Macular Degeneration
- Glaucoma

No two people have the same vision loss. People with the same eye condition may possibly have different levels of vision impairment. With information, support and aids a person who is blind or vision impaired may continue to lead active and independent lives in their own community.

Implications

Various forms of vision impairment may mean that a person is able to see well in one environment or situation but have difficulty seeing in another environment or situation. For example, a person with night blindness may be able to see in daylight but are almost blind at night or in darkened rooms.

People may have difficulty managing daily activities and moving independently in new or changed environments. Training in orientation and mobility, or assistance at work may be required.

Supporting people with Vision Impairment

Always ask first if help is needed. If the student requires assistance, touch the back of their hand with yours and allow them to hold your arm just below the elbow. Remember to walk on the side opposite their cane or guide dog.

Set up the workspace in a quiet spot outside traffic flow. Make sure that there are no projections at head height or eye level.

- Ask about any specific lighting needs. In general, surfaces should be well lit with minimal glare.
- Open and close doors fully rather than leaving them ajar.
- Advise if you have moved objects or furniture.
- Give the person a choice in using lifts, stairs, or escalators.
- Bright yellow lines painted along the edge of dark steps will assist the safety of all workers.

People who use a guide or mobility dog

A guide dog or any animal trained to assist a person with a disability will be highly disciplined. Do not feed, pat or talk to a dog that has its harness on as this will distract them from working. If the animal is inside, ask the owner of any special requirements for the dog i.e. water, exercise or toileting.

Remember also that Anti-discrimination legislation makes it unlawful for guide dogs to be refused entry to any building or public transport.