



Blind and Low Vision

About blind and low vision

'Blind and low vision' refers to significant and ongoing challenges with the ability to see. Some children may be considered 'legally blind' if they cannot see beyond six metres (compared to 60 metres for a child with normal vision) or if their visual field is less than 20 degrees in diameter (compared to 140 degrees for a child with normal vision). Some children may be considered to have 'low vision' if they have permanent vision loss that cannot be corrected with glasses and their ability to complete everyday tasks is affected. Children with low vision may have some sight, but experience difficulties with visual acuity (being able to see detail), accommodation (being able to focus), field of vision (the area that can be seen), colour vision and adapting to different lighting between environments.

As an educator knowing about the type and severity of vision impairment a child has will help you know how best to support them. Some children might be learning to read Braille, or use low vision aid technology like electronic magnifiers, closed-circuit television or tablets. They might need large print materials. Understanding each child's strengths and abilities will allow you to develop ideas about ways to make education safe, fun, and as inclusive as possible.

Strengths

What might be some strengths?

- Children who are blind or low vision can often pay attention normally.
- Some children with low vision respond well to colourful and moving objects.
- Some children who are blind or low vision may have heightened hearing and sense of touch.
- They will often be able to learn just as well as others, if given the right types of learning materials.

Where you might provide support?

- Some children may have trouble making eye contact, reading facial expressions and observing social cues. This can make it more difficult for them to develop and show empathy, and to connect and play with other children.
- Some children may find learning how to talk to others challenging.



- They may find it hard to join in an activity with other children.
- They may find it hard to change activities, or they may become upset if plans are changed without warning.
- Exploring the environment, moving around, and reaching for objects may be challenging.
- Some children may not have as many opportunities to develop play skills.

Evidence-based strategies

Identify different ways that a child can learn

- **Use touch based materials:** Tactile books (books with raised print), book bags or story boxes which have objects in them that relate to a book can be used to add meaning to stories. The Statewide Vision Resource Centre has a range of tactual books and games ideas.
- **Encourage cooperative learning:** To encourage children to interact with others, include activities where all children in a group need to be involved for something to be finished or achieved. For example, during an activity like baking a cake, each child could hold an ingredient to put in, so they are each needed to finish the recipe.
- **Use colour and movement:** Children with low vision might like colourful and moving objects. These can be used to get their attention and help them learn. Consider using the same colours for objects to help them learn what things are (e.g. blue is for a cup, red is for a plate).

Best practice tips

Target literacy skills

- **Get children interested in books:** Consider teaching children about books. This may include showing them how to turn pages, or encouraging them to follow Braille or raised text with their fingers from left to right and top to bottom as you read. Different facial expressions, voices and sounds when reading stories can also help.
- **Shared reading:** Children might learn literacy skills better with shared reading activities. This is where an educator reads with a group of children and interacts with them; replicate this at home with parents where possible.



- **Encourage children to write:** It may be helpful to encourage children to write by giving positive comments about their writing, getting them to read and write their name, and allowing plenty of time for scribble.

Consider safety

- **Remove clutter:** De-cluttering can help children with low vision focus. Having a simple, uncluttered environmental set up might help children move around the space and feel more relaxed. Try removing unnecessary furniture and objects.
- **Check the lighting:** Check to see if the lighting or glare from windows is affecting children with low vision.

Encourage clear communication

- **Give clear directions:** Words such as “this”, “that”, “there” and “here” might not make sense to some children who are blind or low vision, if they can’t see what you are indicating. Consider using specific words and statements to direct children, for example “Please put the box on the table”.
- **Develop children’s communication skills:** Asking a child questions or giving detailed instructions can help them develop their communication skills. Use short and simple sentences. Have predictable and repetitive routines.

Help a child develop their social skills

- **Keep children in the main class:** It’s important for children to stay in the main class for most of the day, rather than with another educator in a different group. This helps them feel the same as other children and allows time for them to get to know other children.
- **Build social skills:** Consider teaching young children skills to help them make friends. Show them how to pay attention to others, ask to play with others, ask what others are doing and tell others what they are doing. It may be helpful to describe and role-play these skills, and give children feedback.



- **Encourage cooperative learning:** To encourage children to interact with others, include activities where all children in a group need to be involved for something to be finished or achieved. For example, during an activity like baking a cake, each child could hold an ingredient to put in, so they are each needed to finish the recipe.
- **Encourage play:** Young children might need support to play, and they may need more play opportunities. When playing with children let them take turns directing the play. If they don't join in immediately, it may help to encourage them with general comments (e.g. "There are a lot of toys in the box"), specific comments (e.g. "Will you play with the dolls with me?") or by physically helping them play (e.g. "Let's race the cars together").

Early Years Learning and Development Outcomes

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Children can learn how to interact with others through developing their social skills and through engaging in play.
- Refer to build social skills, encourage cooperative learning, and encourage play.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Children might need extra help to feel connected to a new environment
- Building social skills, using cooperative learning, and keeping children in the main room, might help them feel connected to others and their environment.
- Other teaching tips that might help include Use touch based materials and removing clutter to help children move around and identify the environment.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Use music in the learning environment to improve mood. Keep learning environments free of clutter and consistent to reduce anxiety.
- Removing clutter may help

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Some young children might need help developing their learning skills. Provide a range of learning materials and encourage children to write and use books.



- Refer to: Use touch based materials, removing clutter and shared reading, and using colour and movement.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Young children might not have access to as much media and text as other children.
- Help by teaching children with sounds and touch. Children with some vision might respond well to colourful and moving objects, and books with real life objects related to the story.
- Refer to: use touch based materials and use colour and movement.
- Develop children's communication skills has simple tips for verbal and nonverbal communication.

Other considerations

Safety

- When applying first aid, talk to children about what you are going to do and check they are happy for you to apply first aid (e.g. "I am putting on a bandaid. Is that okay?")

Excursions/incursions

- Excursions to places that are accessible for children, such as places where there are audio guides, can support a child's learning.
- Museums, galleries and science exhibits often have audio guides.
- Try to plan incursions to be inclusive of blind and low vision children, such as experiences where children get to use their hands and be involved (e.g. the aquarium).

Emergency drills

- Educators will need to guide children who are blind or low vision through emergency drills. It can be helpful for them to have a buddy to assist them if needed and help them feel safe.

Behaviour

- Stories about social situations can highlight positive behaviours and routines in the early childhood education and care setting.



- Refer to the [ABC approach](#) for more information on how to reduce challenging behaviour by supporting the child and promoting more helpful behaviour, and our [emotions page](#) for more information about supporting a child with managing their emotions.

Building relationships

- Some young children may be asked questions about glasses, eye patches, strabismus (cross-eyed), canes or assistive devices. Consider teaching the other children about blind and low vision if the child and their family wishes for you to do so. This can help other children understand the child's experience and develop empathy.

New environments

- Young children will need to be carefully oriented to new environments including the rooms, playgrounds or different learning environments.

Transitions

- Young children who are blind or low vision might need extra preparation when going to primary school. This might mean an individualised learning plan (ILP).
- For more information about supporting children with disabilities when transitioning to a different education setting, access AllPlay Learn's [transition page](#).

Braille

- Some children who are blind or low vision will be learning Braille. Braille is a system of raised dots which can be read through touching the dots with fingers.
- Teaching Braille requires training, however educators can support children using Braille. For example, organising for children's names to be written in Braille and providing materials in Braille may be helpful.

Low vision aids

- Some children might use low vision aids (LVAs) like closed-circuit televisions (CCTV), iPads™ and electronic magnification to read standard printed material.
- Not all educational materials will be useable with LVAs.



Other common challenges

- Young children who are blind or low vision may experience [cerebral palsy](#) or [anxiety](#), or other challenges with [fine & gross motor](#) skills, [learning & memory](#), and [social skills](#).

Relevant resources

Visit our [resources page](#) for a range of resources that can help to create inclusive education environments for children with disabilities and developmental challenges. Some particularly relevant resources for children who are blind and low vision include our [Audio Stories](#), and:

- Stay play talk poster
- Strengths and abilities communication checklist