

Supporting vision impaired children to find their voice

Nobody can understand how your child's vision impairment impacts them better than they can; they may however need support from you to gain the confidence, knowledge, and communication skills to express their needs to others – to self-advocate.

As a parent you have an important part to play in ensuring that your child is receiving the support that they need, but it is also important to recognise when to take a step back and encourage them to advocate for themselves.

This exercise aims to help you to enable your child to have a positive influence on their life, to involve them in decision making, and allow them to identify what works best for them.

The questions below will aid you to reflect on your child's strengths, consider areas where they may need additional support, and potentially highlight areas where you need to encourage your child to use their own voice.

Your child

- How aware do you think your child is of the impact of their eye condition?
- How aware is your child of their own strengths?
- What adjustments does your child need to allow them to be as independent as possible, and is your child able to articulate this themselves?
- How confident is your child to speak for themselves in different environments (at home, at school, or at extra-curricular activities, for example)?
- Has your child contributed to an existing vision passport? If not, you may like to complete the My Eyes and Me template with them to help them explain their vision to others.
- Are you aware of the support your child is entitled to?
- Is your child aware of the support available to them?

Sensory & Communication Support Service in partnership with:

Yourself

Now that you have thought about your child, it is time to consider to what extent you already encourage your child to self-advocate.

The scale is 1-5; 1 being low and indicating a negative impact, with 5 being high and demonstrating a positive influence.

Once you have rated yourself on a scale of 1-5 for each question, you will be ready to develop a strategy to help you and your child move towards greater self-advocacy and independence. Should you wish, Guide Dogs' children and young people's service are available to support with this. The chart below has two columns and eight rows. Contact details are below.

	Scale 1-5				
Do you talk about your child's needs without including them in the conversation?	1	2	3	4	5
Do you speak on behalf of your child before establishing if they would like to be spoken for?	1	2	3	4	5
Do you allow your child to answer questions about their condition independently in a way that they are comfortable with?	1	2	3	4	5
Do you complete tasks for your child before considering how they can be enabled to do it independently?	1	2	3	4	5
Do you support your child to make choices for themselves about things that relate directly to them?	1	2	3	4	5
Do you provide age-appropriate information to your child about their vision impairment and its impact on their vision?	1	2	3	4	5
Do you encourage your child to ask questions about the support available to them?	1	2	3	4	5

Guide Dogs' children and young people's services can be contacted by calling 0800 781 1444 or emailing children@guidedogs.org.uk.

Answering your Child's Questions

As your child becomes aware of their vision impairment, it is highly likely that they will have questions about their condition and how it may affect them and their future. When such questions arise, it is possible that you may feel unable or unwilling to answer. This may be because you would naturally like to protect your child, because you do not have the answers yourself, or you have not yet come to terms with their diagnosis in your own right.

These concerns and feelings are natural and are part of a process you will go through whilst coming to terms with and learning to accept your child's condition.

Being open and honest can help to prevent your child becoming frightened by or uncomfortable with their vision impairment. This approach will also help them to feel secure, and aware that you are there to support them to overcome any obstacles or barriers they may face.

Try to avoid keeping secrets from your child as this may lead to feelings of unease and/or anxiety. This is also true for brothers and sisters of children with vision impairments who will be worried and anxious about what is happening in the family. Please see our information sheet on supporting brothers and sisters for more advice on this issue.

If you do not feel able to answer your child's questions because you do not feel that you yourself have the answers, or you are not sure when the time is right, it is possible to seek help and support from various sources.

In the first instance, you can speak with your child's eye doctor (Ophthalmologist), who will be able to discuss your child's condition and diagnosis with you from a medical standpoint.

Our Family Support Officers can support you with a range of issues surrounding your child's diagnosis: we are available so you have someone to talk to outside your family circle, we can explain medical terminology, and we can offer advice and information on other sources of support and services which could be relevant to your child.

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