

Blindness and Low Vision

Fact Sheet

DEFINITION

Blindness and low vision refer to impairments in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a learner's educational performance. The term includes a reduction of acuity at distance or near, visual field restrictions, a deteriorating eye condition, and a visual loss caused by a disturbance of the posterior visual pathways and/or cortex.

Note: Development Delay is not an appropriate eligibility category for learners who meet the criteria above.

TYPES

The terms low vision, legally blind, totally blind and cortical visual impairment are used in the educational context to describe learners with visual impairments. All types are after correction and are defined as follows:

- Low Vision generally refers to a significant visual impairment, not limited to distance that measure between 20/70 and 20/160. Learners are generally unable to read standard print at a normal viewing distance, even with the aid of eyeglasses or contact lenses. They use a combination of vision and other senses to learn, often requires adaptations in lighting and accommodations such as low vision devices, large print and sometimes braille;
- Legally blind indicates that a learner has less than 20/200 vision in the better eye or a very limited field of vision (20 degrees at its widest point). These learners often requires adaptations in lighting and accommodations such as low vision devices, large print, audio, braille or a combination of learning medium;
- Totally blind generally indicated that the learner has little to no light perception. These learners often require accommodations such as audio and braille.
- Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) is neurological disorder, which results in unique visual responses to people, to educational materials and to the environment. These learner exhibit characteristic behaviors associated with cortical visual impairment. Intervention, adaptations and accommodations are designed along these identified behavioral characteristics.

EVALUATIONS

The following evaluations are those identified as unique for this population (all types listed above):

- Functional Vision Assessment is conducted by a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI). It determines what the learner can see, how (s) he uses his/her vision (including sustainability of use), and under what conditions (s) he can see. Its focus is on accessing the wide range of educational materials available across all environments. Updates are recommended annually or if there is a change in vision, environments or educational materials. For learners with cortical vision impairment(s), the FVA encompasses the characteristic behaviors associated with CVI.
- Orientation and Mobility is conducted by a certified O & M Specialist. It determines the learner's ability to attain systematic orientation to and to safely movement within his/her environments in school, home, and community.
- Learning Media Assessment is conducted by a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) and determines the appropriate literacy media or medium for these learners. It includes use of braille, print, auditory strategies, objects and pictures. Note: IDEA presumes all learners eligible under this category will receive braille. If it is not appropriate for a learner, the IEP Team must determine the learner does not need and will not have future need for braille.
- Children's Vision Rehabilitation Project (CVRP) brings comprehensive low vision evaluations and optical devises to learners across the state.

POSSIBLE SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The effect of visual problems on a learner's development depends on the severity, type of loss, age at which the condition appears, and overall functioning level of the learner. Many learners who have multiple disabilities may also have visual impairments resulting in motor, cognitive and/or social developmental delays.

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A young learner with a visual impairment has little reason to explore interesting objects in the environment and, thus, may miss opportunities to have experiences and to learn. This lack of exploration may continue until

learning become motivating or until appropriate intervention begins.

TEACHING TIPS/INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Regardless of the degree of impairment, learners who are blind or have low vision should be expected to participate fully in classroom activities. Note: TVIs are a valuable resource for the classroom teacher.

- Use verbal cues such as announcing when you enter or leave the classroom; always use the learners' names when calling on someone.
- Use descriptive language and combine your physical action with verbal descriptions. Classroom materials and the environment must be accessible to the learner. This includes smart boards, class posters, homework assignments, and environmental adaptations such as lighting.
- Flexibility and understanding may be needed to make changes in your classroom. Additional equipment, a guide dog or the presence of another adult in your classroom may be needed.

RESOURCES

- Deafness and Hard of Hearing
<http://wvde.state.wv.us/osp/hearingresources.html>