

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. Some examples of the term include 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. The terms low vision, legally blind, totally, blind, and cortical visual impairments are sometimes used to describe learners with visual impairments.

Evaluations

The following evaluations are those identified as unique for this population.

- » 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 devices 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.

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 becomes 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

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Low Incidence Disabilities - West Virginia Department of Education (wvde.us)