



a Family Guide to Special Education Services

VISUALLY IMPAIRED

VOLUME 13



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Family Guides for Special Education Services

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Other MDE Resources

- General resources for parents:
📍 mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources
- Parent Engagement and Support
📍 mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families
☎ 601.359.3498
- Procedural Safeguards: Your Family's Special Education Rights
📍 mdek12.org/OSE/Dispute-Resolution

VISUALLY IMPAIRED (VI)



Definition

Visual Impairment (VI) including blindness means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.



Evaluation Requirements

When the evaluation team is considering eligibility under the Visually Impaired category, the comprehensive evaluation report(s) and/or eligibility determination report must include a report from an ophthalmologist or optometrist that includes all of the following:

- visual acuity,
- diagnosed visual problems,
- a statement of how the child's visual problem might affect educational performance, and
- recommendations for educational programming.

BRAILLE ALPHABET

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0			



Helpful Vocabulary

Accommodation—Tool that enables a student with a disability to better access the general curriculum. Some accommodations are applicable to instruction only (for example, an assignment that is shortened but still addresses the state standard); others are permitted for both instruction and assessment (for example, change in formatting or timing).

Expanded core curriculum (ECC)—The body of knowledge and skills that are needed by students with visual impairments due to their unique disability specific needs. The nine areas referred to as the ECC are: compensatory skills, orientation and mobility, social interaction, independent living, recreation and leisure, sensory efficiency, assistive technology, career education, and self-determination.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Foundational requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities education Act of 2004 (IDEA) stipulating that special education and related services must be provided at public expense (that is, without charge to parents), meet state requirements, include an appropriate education that leads to outcomes such as employment or higher education, and conform to the Individualized education Program (IEP) prepared for the student.

Functional Vision Assessment (FVA) —An evaluation of an individual’s visual strengths and limitations as they relate to the ability to interact with the environment visually (how they use their vision to function).

Inclusion—The practice of educating children with disabilities in the general education classroom. Inclusion in special education programs is an important part of the continuum of special education placements required by the Individuals with Disabilities education Act (IDEA). In an inclusion classroom, a student with disabilities feels

included, accepted, and makes friends, and the student’s peers learn to better understand their classmate’s disabilities.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)—A law that makes available a free public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)—A document written for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with state and federal policies.

Learning Media Assessment (LMA) —An evaluation conducted by a teacher of students with visual impairments (VI) to determine if specific visual, tactual, and/or auditory learning media are appropriate for a learner.

Light perception (LP)—The ability to perceive the difference between light and dark, or daylight and nighttime. A person can have severely reduced vision and still be able to determine the difference between light and dark or the general source and direction of a light.

Modification—Adjustment to an assignment, test, or activity in a way that significantly simplifies or lowers the standard or alters the original measurement. modifications change what a student is taught or expected to learn, and most are applicable to students with significant cognitive disabilities.

No light perception (NLP)—The complete lack of light perception and form perception, often referred to as “total blindness.”

Orientation and mobility (O&M)—A set of concepts, skills, and techniques for safe and efficient travel by individuals with visual impairments.

Related services—Additional support services that a child with disabilities requires, such as transportation, occupational, physical, speech pathology services, interpreters, medical services, etc.

School-based services—Special education services provided in the local school district. These services may be provided in a general or special education setting depending on the needs of the child and availability within the district.

Significant cognitive disability (SCD)—In order for a student to be classified as having a significant cognitive disability, all of the following criteria must be true:

- The student demonstrates significant cognitive deficits and poor adaptive skill levels (as determined by that student’s comprehensive evaluation) that prevent participation in the standard academic curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards, even with accommodations and modifications.
- The student requires extensive direct instruction in both academic and functional skills in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of those skills.
- The student’s inability to complete the standard academic curriculum is neither the result of excessive or extended absences nor is primarily the result of visual, auditory, or physical disabilities, emotional behavioral disabilities, specific learning disabilities, or social, cultural, or economic differences.

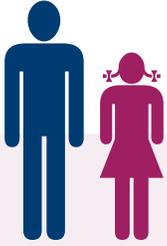
Speech-language pathologist (SLP)—A speech-language pathologist works to prevent, assess, diagnose, and treat speech, language, social communication, cognitive communication, and swallowing disorders in children and adults.

Specially designed instruction (SDI)—universally required component that defines special education and stipulates that students with disabilities receive instruction that includes changes in content, methodology, and/or delivery. It is not dependent on setting and is a primary responsibility of special education professionals.

Ways to Help at Home



Vision is one of our five senses. Being able to see gives us tremendous access to learning about the world around us—people’s faces and the subtleties of expression, what different things look like and how big they are, and the physical environments where we live and move, including approaching hazards.

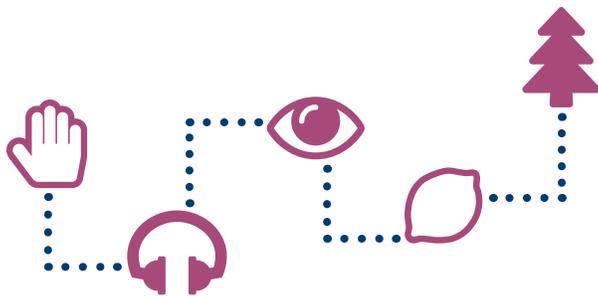


Tips for Parents

Adapted from parentcenterhub.org/visualimpairment

1. Learn as much as you can about your child’s specific visual impairment. The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child.
2. Understand that your child is receiving small bits of information at a time, not all at once through vision. Help your child explore new things with her or his senses and build up a concept of the whole. For example, your child might need to be shown a banana, help you peel it, feel the banana without its skin, have a bite of it, and then help you mash it in a bowl to understand the qualities of bananas and that bananas can be eaten in different ways.
3. Encourage curiosity and explore new things and places often with your child. Give lots of opportunity to touch and investigate objects, ask questions, and hear explanations of what something is, where it comes from, and so on.
4. Learn how to adapt your home, given the range and degree of your child’s visual impairment. Help your son or daughter explore the house and learn to navigate it safely.
5. Encourage your child’s independence by letting her or him do things rather than you doing them. Use hands-on guidance to teach how to do a chore, giving lots of practice opportunities with feedback.
6. Work with the early interventionists or school staff (depending on your child’s age) to build a solid individualized plan of services and supports that address your child’s unique developmental and educational needs.
7. Talk to other parents of children who have visual impairments similar to your child’s. They can be a great source of support and insight into the challenges and joys of raising a child with vision impairments.
8. Keep in touch with the professionals working with your child, offering support, demonstrating any assistive technology your child uses, and providing any information teachers will need.

Children with visual impairments can certainly learn and do learn well, but they lack the easy access to visual learning that children with sight have. The enormous amount of learning that takes place via vision must now be achieved using other senses and methods.



Families, friends, and others can support sensorial learning in many ways.

- “mmm. Do you smell dinner?” appeals to the child’s sense of smell.
- “listen to that bird singing outside” calls to the child’s hearing. You might also say, “That’s a robin,” which gives the child a name for the bird that sings the song she or he is hearing.
- “Your clothes are so soft today” speaks to the child’s sense of touch and helps the child build a picture of the whole from the many details.

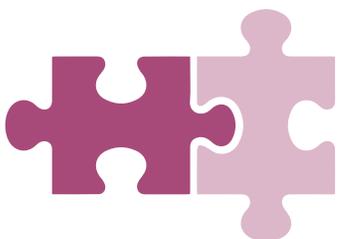
How Can You Help Your Child

Adapted from [wikihow.com/Help-a-Blind-or-Visually-Impaired-Child-Socialize](https://www.wikihow.com/Help-a-Blind-or-Visually-Impaired-Child-Socialize)

Three Ways to Help Your Blind or Visually Impaired Child Socialize

Children learn social skills most often by watching and mimicking others. For this reason, children with visual impairments often struggle to socialize and make friends with peers. Because blind children cannot learn from observation, be direct in telling them about social norms and cues. Explain the necessary skills for carrying on a conversation, expressing themselves, and entering a group.

1. Establish the importance of social skills. Building social skills encourages positive, healthy development. Bonding with siblings, parents, and family members provides a social safety net for the child. Connecting with peers increases self-esteem, self-worth, confidence, and independence.
 - Social skills are also known as soft skills. Soft skills are needed while children interact with peer groups, teachers, and counselors at school, and with future employers as an adult. By teaching children these skills, you encourage positive growth and future success.
2. Set appropriate goals. Before helping a child socialize, you must first identify goals and expectations. Establish what it means to you and the child to have good social skills. This will help you understand what the child feels she or he needs and expects in addition to your social standards.
 - A child who exhibits an extroverted personality may thrive more during social stimulation and actively seek out a connection with others. A child who is more introverted may need more encouragement to connect with others, and more alone time to recharge.
 - Get to know the child's personality and what she or he feels comfortable with and provide unconditional support. Never force a child to do something she or he doesn't feel comfortable with.
 - Those who are blind or visually impaired may sometimes feel less competent than their sighted peers. Be an advocate for them and let them know that being visually impaired does not have to stop them from forming meaningful connections with others.
3. Encourage conversation skills. Children who are blind often struggle to maintain conversations. A visually impaired child may have difficulty interpreting nonverbal cues and may feel reluctant to express her or his feelings or needs. The child may need help learning how to engage in skills like carrying on a sustained conversation and staying engaged with another person. These are teachable skills, so work on them with your child.
 - Practice taking turns speaking, asking questions, and being interested in what the other person is saying or doing.
 - If your child needs prompting, say, "I asked what you were doing. Do you want to ask what I'm doing?"



Being able to see enables us to capture the whole of an object immediately. This isn't so for children with a visual impairment. They cannot see the whole, they have to work from the details up to build an understanding of the whole.

Home Modifications for Those With Low Vision



Adapted from blog.hireahelper.com/home-modifications-visually-impaired-blind

If your child has a visual impairment, you will want to outfit your home in a way that will make life more efficient. Depending on your child's degree of visual impairment, there are simple adjustments that can be made to help with day-to-day activities.

Thankfully, many of these modifications are low-cost and fairly easy to implement. It's just a matter of knowing the basics and planning.

1. Adjust the Lighting. You will want to provide plenty of lighting in the areas of the home used for recreation, reading, and socializing. Light should always be aimed at the point of focus (i.e., where your child will be doing work, not at the eyes). Tips to help provide adequate lighting around the house include:

- Adding floor and table lamps around the living room, dining room, kitchen, and bedroom. Clip-on lights can be placed strategically around the house for added convenience.
- Use lighting that is 60-100 watts. Replace burned out bulbs regularly so your child is able to see better.
- Allow for natural light to enter the home by using adjustable blinds or sheer curtains.
- Experiment with lighting to find out which works best for your child's needs. There is halogen, fluorescent, incandescent, or flood lighting, and most people will prefer different ones. It's worth noting that fluorescent light does bother many visually impaired people.
- Keep a flashlight or heavy-duty light on a keychain or have a few around the house in case you need additional light at night.
- Make sure light is uniform throughout your entire hallway to more easily identify where it curves or ends.

2. Rearrange the Furniture. Rearranging the furniture in your house can help your child move around more easily and avoid injury. There are also certain ways you can arrange your furniture to add convenience and functionality to the living space.

- Place mirrors strategically to avoid glare or reflecting light.
- Keep some chairs near the windows in case you want to read, work, or craft in the natural light.
- Arrange furniture close together to help make conversing with others easier.
- When buying new furniture, try to pick upholstery with texture. This will help to better identify different pieces of furniture.

3. Eliminate Safety Hazards. Feeling safe inside your own home is important. There are a number of things you can do to prevent falls and other injuries, and most of them are quite simple.

- Keep desk and table chairs pushed in and train your family to do the same. All the time. No exceptions.
- Use non-skid, non-glare products to clean and polish your floors. Avoid waxing floors, which can make them slippery.
- Remove low-lying objects that might be trip hazards such as coffee tables and end tables.
- Ensure there are no cords in any of the pathways to prevent tripping.
- Tape down any area rugs and replace any worn carpeting or floor coverings.
- Keep all floors dry and wipe up any spills immediately.
- Install grab bars or safety rails in high-slip areas like the bathroom or the stairs.

- Mark step edges with yellow reflective tape so they can be easily identified.
- Always keep a fire extinguisher and first aid kit in the same, easily accessible place.
- Make sure all exits are marked with a bright, contrasting color in case of emergency.
- Have smoke and fire alarms checked often, and ensure they are loud enough to be heard in all areas of the house.

4. Use Contrasting Colors. Keep the color principles top of mind as you prepare your home. Bright colors are often the easiest to see since they reflect light. Solid, brighter colors such as orange, red, and yellow are more visible than their muted counterparts.

It's important to keep in mind that dim light can wash out certain colors, while bright light can amplify them. Test what works best and use contrasting colors to make the areas of your house easier to distinguish.

- Use brightly colored vases, lamps, or sculptures to help identify where key pieces of furniture are. Avoid patterned upholstery and rugs. Stripes and checks can create confusion for some people who are visually impaired.
- Use color to indicate changes in surface level (e.g., on the stairs).
- Use contrasting colors to warn about places that may be hazardous or require extra attention (e.g., fluorescent tape on the inside of doors or cabinets that may be ajar).
- Color-code household items you use often or bills and documents you may need to work with (Brightly colored post-it notes work great.).
- Drape a brightly colored blanket or towel in a contrasting color on the back of a favorite chair or spot on the couch.
- use dark, solid colors as borders around white or light objects (e.g., a light switch) to help them stand out.

- Place dark objects (like chairs) in front of lighter colored walls to help these items stand out.
- Avoid using clear glass dishes and cups since they are more difficult to see.
- Paint door knobs and door frames a bright color so they are easier to see.
- use a different color of paint on the ceiling than the walls.
- use solid, non-patterned rugs to help identify different areas of the home.

5. Create an Organized Environment. If you keep your home organized, it will be easier to find things when you need them. It can also eliminate any tripping hazards and reduce frustration when doing everyday chores. Here are some tips to help you stay organized:

- Label, label, label. label everything in your home, from reusable bottles to hangers for clothing to on/off switches. You can even label cabinets.
- Use drawer dividers and closet organizers to separate clothing.
- Label the clothing tag with the letter of the clothing color.
- Develop a system to keep food and toiletry items organized. Always keep these items in the same place and label them as necessary.
- Always keep chairs and other easily movable furniture in the same place.
- Use large, numbered devices for telephones, timers, calculators, or anything with numbers that need to be seen.
- Train family members to respect the organizational system and explain to them why and how it helps.

6. Remove Obstacles and Hazards. As with those who have low vision, people who are fully blind will want to remove as many trip hazards and obstacles as possible. Things should always be placed in the same spot, and you should make sure your family follows these house rules whenever possible. Here are some other tips to keep safe from hazards at home:

- Install a phone entry system for the front door to speak to anyone who comes to it.
- Avoid having any low-hanging lamps or other obstacles your child could bump her or his head on.
- Keep furniture in the same place at all times and instruct family members to do the same.
- Identify spots throughout your home where a walking cane can be placed and easily retrieved. Keep anything that can be easily knocked off a table away from the edges. Perhaps avoid having too many lamps, art, or breakable sculptures.
- Label all medicines and any unidentifiable food with braille labels.
- Keep any cleaning products in a safe cabinet and ensure each product is properly labeled. It can be handy to keep these in a separate spot from the food products to avoid contamination.
- Avoid having a flat-topped stove in your kitchen. Your stove should have a change of texture to indicate where the burner is located. If possible, avoid easy to turn knobs on the stove and oven. Install handrails in the bathroom, by the tub, in the shower, and down the side of any stairs.
- Close closet and cupboard doors as soon as you are done with them and have your family do the same.

7. Install Safe Flooring. Installing safe, non-slip flooring throughout your home is one of the best things you can do for your child's safety. Nowadays, there are even tactile warning strips and tiles to assist with easier navigate throughout the home. Here are some things you can do to your floor to keep your child safe:

- Install warning textiles in front of doorways or changes in level throughout the home.
- Install tactile strips along frequently traveled routes in the house to make getting around more convenient.
- Take away any area rugs or, if you prefer to have them, ensure they are taped down properly. Avoid slick surfaces in areas like the kitchen and bathroom. Have a bathmat (or several) in the bathroom at all times.

8. Give Your Home a Tactile Effect. Adding tactile elements to your interior design can help your child use her or his sense of touch to easily navigate your house. There are several things you can keep in mind when designing your home or that you can easily modify after the fact. You should:

- Buy furniture that has textured upholstery. This will allow you to recognize furniture in different rooms by their texture.
- use tactile markers in the kitchen and bathroom to identify where things are located and when to use caution.
- use embossed letter stickers to help in distinguishing between different things. For example, an F could let your child know she or he is turning on the living room fan.
- mark toothbrushes or other important items with rubber bands or other tactile aids so they can be easily identified.
- Use braille labels for anything that needs special identification.

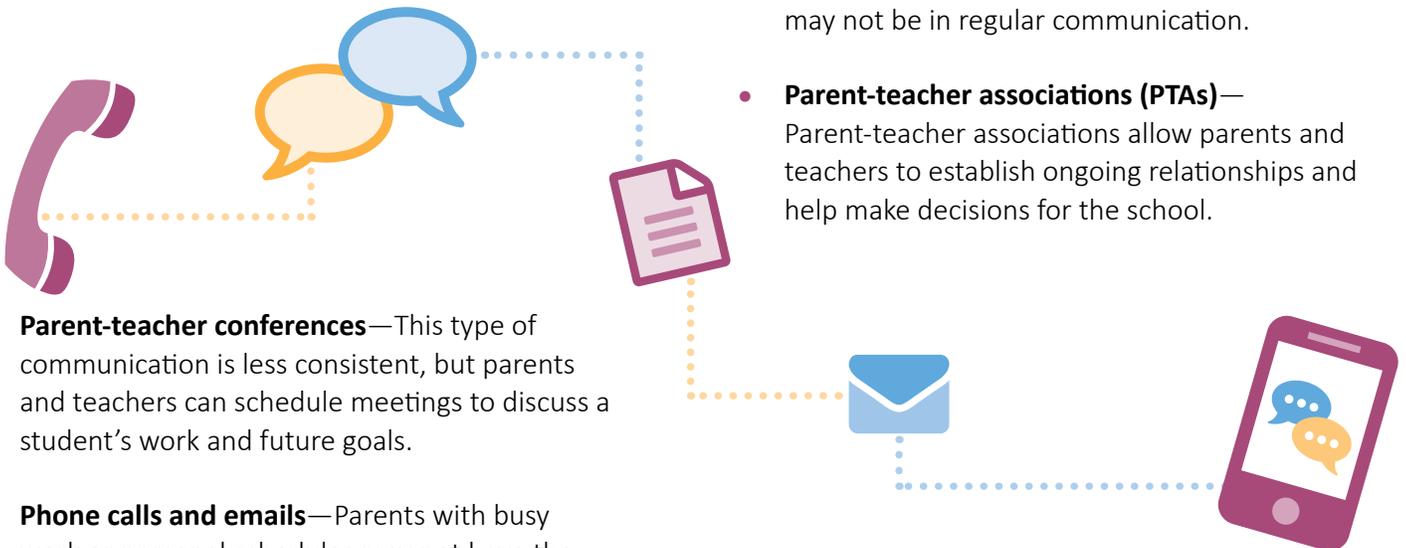


Successful Parent-Teacher Communication

Adapted from Parent-Teacher Communication: Strategies for Effective Parent Inclusion & Engagement | American University—soeonline.american.edu/blog/parent-teacher-communication

Communication is key to a successful inclusion classroom. Parents, general education teachers, and special educators can try the following tactics for successful parent-teacher communication:

- Regular in-person communication**—This type of communication works great for parents who typically drop off and pick up their children from school.
- Open houses**—Most schools host annual open houses where parents can visit their children’s classrooms. This allows teachers to meet parents for the first time or meet a second parent who may not be in regular communication.
- Parent-teacher associations (PTAs)**—Parent-teacher associations allow parents and teachers to establish ongoing relationships and help make decisions for the school.
- Parent-teacher conferences**—This type of communication is less consistent, but parents and teachers can schedule meetings to discuss a student’s work and future goals.
- Phone calls and emails**—Parents with busy work or personal schedules may not have the opportunity to go to the school or schedule conferences. These parents may be easier to reach via phone or email. Phone calls and emails can also be used by teachers to regularly communicate with parents between conferences.
- Text messages**—Some teachers use mass text messages or special messaging apps to communicate with parents. Several text services, such as Remind, cater specifically to teachers.
- Homework handouts and newsletters**—Teachers can create handouts containing information about homework and other tasks for students to take home. Teachers can also write weekly or monthly newsletters to update parents on what is going on in the classroom and how they can participate.
- Class websites**—Teachers can create classroom websites to post announcements, homework, and reminders to help ensure they don’t get lost in communication between the classroom and home. Similar methods of communication include social media sites or learning management platforms such as ClassDojo.





Resources

- American Council of the Blind (ACB)**—Founded in 1961 with the mission to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity, and quality of life for all blind and visually impaired people.

📍 acb.org

☎️ 800.866.3242
- American Printing House for the Blind (APH)**—The world's largest nonprofit organization, the APH creates accessible learning experiences for people who are blind and visually impaired through educational, workplace, and independent living products and services.

📍 aph.org/athomewithaph-resources/

☎️ 800.223.1839
- National Braille Association (NBA)**—A nonprofit organization dedicated to providing continuing education to those who prepare braille and braille materials to persons who are visually impaired.

📍 nationalbraille.org
- National Library Service (NLS) for the Blind and Print Disabled Library of Congress**—Administers a free national library program that provides braille and recorded materials to people who cannot see regular print or handle print materials. Also provides music materials and refreshable braille displays.

📍 loc.gov/nls
- The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) Office of Special Education**—A service-oriented office that seeks to improve the education experience for children with disabilities.

📍 <http://mdek12.org/OSE>
- Paths to Literacy for Students Who are Blind or Visually Impaired**—PA joint project between Perkins School for the Blind and Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), this website combines resources and expertise to assist educators and families in the quest to provide literacy experiences for children who are blind or visually impaired. The information on this site ranges from a basic overview of literacy to various stages of development and special challenges, as well as an exploration of different media (print, braille, auditory strategies).

📍 pathstoliteracy.org
- U.S. Department of Education**—Their mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

📍 ed.gov
- U.S. Department of Education-Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services**—The mission of the Office of Special Education Programs is to lead the nation's efforts to improve outcomes for children with disabilities, birth through 21, and their families, ensuring access to fair, equitable, and high-quality education and services.

📍 ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers

MDE-specific resources include:

- General resources for parents:**

📍 mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources
- Parent Engagement and Support**

📍 mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families

☎️ 601.359.3498
- Procedural Safeguards: Your Family's Special Education Rights**

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Acknowledgments

