

Peer Information Sheet: Blind and Low Vision

All young people are unique. We all have strengths, and we all have areas where we are still learning. We are all born with our own unique combination of hair, facial features, personality, and our own very unique fingerprints.

*Some people might be blind or have low vision. Just like hair or facial features or fingerprints, this is a **part** of them, but not **who they are**. When you take the time to get to know them, you'll find there are lots of things you have in common.*

About Blind and Low Vision

Teens who are blind or have low vision have vision loss that will affect their ability to see and complete everyday tasks. Different teens will have different levels of vision loss - some might be able to see in certain situations, while others might not be able to see at all.

Friendship tips

Being a teenager is often a time when friendships become really important to us. We often want to spend more time with people our age who share similar interests. We might worry more about what other people think, because we want to fit in.

Feeling a part of a group, feeling like you belong, is important for all young people. This includes teenagers who are blind or have low vision. Some teens might not be able to see your facial expressions. Facial expressions help us to understand how someone is feeling and seeing body language helps us to know how to join in and be a part of things. Being aware that teens can't see how you are feeling, and can't see what others are up to, can help you include and build a friendship with them. Talk to them about your feelings (both "good" and "bad"), your reactions, and what is happening (e.g. "Claire's laughing because she accidentally squirted her drink bottle!").

Also, remember that they might not be able to find you or other friends at lunchtimes, in the classroom, or at other times. You can help by organising when and where to meet them, looking out for them, sitting in the same places in the class, and by asking them whether you can change the way you're doing something together to help support them.

Finding their way around

Some teens might know their way around the school and classroom, but might not see small things left on the floor or might need help if furniture and things are moved around. It's a good idea to pick up things if you drop them, and to keep the classroom, locker areas and any other shared spaces neat and tidy.

Vision supports

Some teens who might get tired easily when they are reading. They might need to hold books and paper closer to their face. They may have mobility or vision aids, like magnifiers, sunglasses, laptops, or walking canes. Sometimes teens might feel self-conscious about their aids. It can be hard to feel like you might stand out at school. Provide reassurance if they bring it up, and be mindful to avoid making jokes about their aids.



Teacher Aides

Some teens might have a teacher's aide or other support staff in the classroom. You can still talk and work with them when their aide is there – their aide is there to support their learning, but they cannot replace the value of working and interacting with other students of the same age.

Stop bullying!

Bullying and exclusion can have a devastating impact on a young person's life. This can be particularly difficult for a young person with a disability if they are excluded, picked on, laughed at and bullied because of their disability. If you see a young person with a disability being excluded or bullied, you can make a big difference in that moment. In fact, your help and support may make a difference or be remembered long after YOU have forgotten all about it!

If you see a young person being bullied at school, and it is safe for you to speak out, speak up and tell those who are bullying to stop. Tell them that it isn't okay and it isn't cool. Standing up for someone else stops bullying more than half of the time! If you are still worried about exclusion or bullying, ask a teacher or another adult for help, or help the young person seek help and support. Speaking up and reaching out can help keep them safe, and can have a lasting impact on their life.

Just like you

Teenagers who are blind or have low vision have lots of ways in which they're just like you. They have their own interests, preferences and hopes and dreams, just like you do. They want to feel like their ideas, views and input is valued, just like you do. And they want to feel connected – like they belong – through having friends, going to parties, hanging out, and being included... just like you do.

So remember, you probably have more things in common than you have differences!