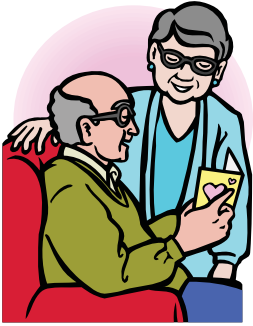


Do You Know Someone with Vision Loss?

An encouraging and understanding support system is an important factor and valuable resource for a person adapting to vision loss. Family, friends and health care workers can make a difference in vision rehabilitation.



Since each person's experience of vision loss is different, open communication fosters mutual understanding. Some people have poor peripheral vision while others may have limited central vision. Some people have trouble seeing at night; another person has difficulty seeing colors or details. And sometimes a person's vision may be affected by the degree of contrast or by lighting conditions.

For example, a person with Macular Degeneration may be challenged with recognizing faces or reading, but can use peripheral vision to move around easily. By comparison, a person with peripheral vision loss may have difficulty becoming oriented to space, but may be able to read.

The following tips are general suggestions offered by people with vision loss. To avoid confusion and offer helpful assistance, it's always best to ask the person how your support could be most effective.

- When greeting me, please say your name and let me know when you enter or leave a room.
- By looking directly at me and addressing me by name, I'll know you are talking to me. Unless otherwise requested, there is no need to raise your voice or direct questions to a sighted companion.
- Let me do as much as I can, even if it takes me longer or if I do it differently than you would.
- If you think I need help, ask me first. If help is requested, I can tell you what I need or how we can do it together.

- When providing directions, try to be as specific as possible. Instead of saying "It's over there," try: "The tape recorder is on your left."
- I may have an easier time reading menus, activity calendars, phone numbers, announcements etc. if they are printed in large print with bold black letters. Sixteen point font or larger is the easiest to read either via a computer or written with a bold, black pen on white paper.
- Tape or paint steps and curbs with a contrasting color. Usually white or optic yellow is best.
- Provide adequate lighting for the task at hand and in stairways and hallways.
- If I am walking with you, I will take your arm. Using the "sighted guide" technique, I'll keep a half-step behind you to anticipate curbs, steps and doorways.
- Remember that a door to a room, cabinet or car left partially open is a hazard to me. Please move or eliminate objects such as low tables and throw rugs to prevent falls.
- When guiding me to a chair, place my hand on the back, arm or seat so I can sense its placement and seat myself.
- With a few additional verbal and/or tactile directions and descriptions, I can participate in most activities.
- Keep the environment as predictable and consistent as possible. If common rooms have been rearranged, I may need orientation to new surroundings.
- Dining may be made easier by contrasting food with dinnerware: mashed potatoes on a dark plate, beets on a white plate etc. Also, I may appreciate a clockwise identification of food placement on a plate.
- When offering me a ride, place my hand on the car door handle. I will take responsibility for opening the door and seating myself.

- As I adjust to vision loss, I may experience a wide range of emotions including worry, anger, frustration and fear. I will let you know how you can help whether it is by listening or offering help when needed.

Please keep in mind the above tips are just suggestions and each person will want to be treated differently. **The most important thing you can do for someone who has vision loss is to listen** and always ask before assisting them.

Caregiver Support

Remember that just as a person with sight loss needs support, so does a caregiver. At times, even family, friends and health care workers may have questions or feel overwhelmed with emotions as they become actively involved with someone with vision loss. Becoming involved in the vision rehabilitation process and receiving support can be important factors as both the caregiver and the person with vision loss adapt to changes.

Five basic strategies to help caregivers control the destructive effects of stress:

1. **Set realistic goals and expectations.**
 - Plan achievable goals.
 - Develop realistic expectations.
2. **Establish your limits.**
3. **Ask for and accept help.**
4. **Take care of yourself.**
 - Express your feelings.
 - Maintain your health.
 - Take time for yourself.
5. **Involve other people.**
 - Hold a family conference.
 - Get professional guidance.
 - Use community resources.



Final Thoughts...

Find out about caregiver support groups in your community. If none exists consider starting one. And if your loved one has not received vision rehabilitation, we strongly encourage you to find out about these services, which can make a profound difference in the quality of his/her life — and in your life together. Your loved one may want to consider joining a support group with others who are coping with vision loss, to decrease isolation, make friends, share concerns and find solutions to everyday issues.

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Programs and Services

- Low vision clinic and low vision rehabilitation
- Instruction in independent living skills
- Professional counseling and support groups
- Safe travel and orientation training
- Education, information and referral services
- Assistive Technology resources
- Adaptive aids specialty store, SightConnection

Since 1965, our mission has been to work with individuals, families and communities to restore, maintain and enhance the independence and well-being of people with impaired vision.

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