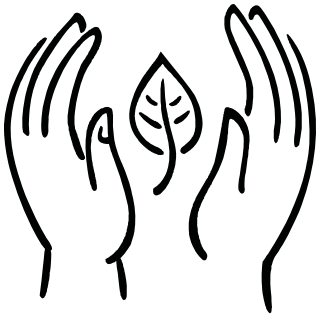


## Helpful Insights and Tips for Coping with Vision Loss



Each person's reaction to the diagnosis of serious, irreversible vision loss is different, but for most people this is emotionally devastating news. They may leave their physician's office feeling very alone and convinced the worst has happened and there is no cure -- no hope for leading an active, independent life. To make matters worse, they may be unaware of organizations in their communities that specialize in helping people with vision loss learn new skills and maintain their independence.

Between the time of the diagnosis and the time they become actively engaged in learning new skills, people new to vision loss must deal with the impact of the diagnosis, learn about their eye condition and understand its functional implications, reconsider self-concepts, address issues related to family and friends, think about a host of practical issues and cope with a myriad of emotions. Many have found their emotional reactions resemble those they have experienced with other significant losses in their lives, and the ways they cope with their grief and rejoin the mainstream of life are similar.

Grieving is a natural response to a significant loss. Here are some of common elements of the grieving process:

**Shock and denial:** Immediately after learning about a significant loss there is a feeling of disbelief. Many of us experience the emptiness of the loss again and again.

**Emotional expression:** When we begin to realize the full impact of the loss we've experienced, we may find we express our emotions through tears, sadness or anger.



**Depression and isolation:** We often feel alone, believing no one else can understand the full impact of our loss, and tend to withdraw from our usual social life. We may feel helpless and hopeless: "What is there to live for if I can't see?"

**Physical symptoms:** Many of us experience physical reactions such as insomnia, loss of appetite and difficulty concentrating on and managing routine tasks.

**Panic:** Feelings of fear about the loss can affect our ability to make decisions or think about day-to-day activities. We can become preoccupied and think of little more than our loss. A feeling of inadequacy can lead to panic, as tasks once mastered are now frustrating and difficult to accomplish. We often think in terms of giving up an activity rather than attempting a new approach.

**Guilt or regrets:** Some of us find ourselves feeling a sense of guilt that surprises us. "I should have gone to the doctor sooner." ; "Maybe I should have had a second opinion."; "I shouldn't have read so much as a child." These normal feelings are often attempts to understand why the loss has occurred.

**Anger:** As we move out of depression, we often have more energy, and can express feelings of anger we often didn't know we had. Anger helps us begin to direct the grief outward, and allows us to move beyond feelings that "life is not fair."

**Resistance to normal activities:** We may resist returning to normal activities, and attempts to do so are often painful and stressful. This is particularly true if we need to learn new skills or make significant life changes.

**Hope begins to return:** We begin to experience periods of hope that things will improve, and the future holds promise. For many of us, this hope comes with the learning of skills that enable us to return to normal and significant activities.

**Rebuilding:** We realize we can live in the world again and have an active role. We have adjusted our lives to the new reality our vision loss has

created, and it becomes one—but only one—of the many aspects of our identity.

What particular shape the grieving process assumes, and how long it lasts, is different for each person. For some, the period of deep grief may last a few days or weeks; for others, it may last months.

It is important to remember what is helpful for one person may not be helpful for another. Respecting the individuality of each person's experience is essential. The understanding, sensitivity, and support of family, friends and helping professionals can go a long way toward assisting someone new to serious vision loss find his or her own best way of coping with a new reality.



The following suggestions may be of help in this process:

1. **Acknowledge** and accept your feelings about vision loss.
2. **Recognize** and identify the successful coping skills you have used before in your life. They can help you cope with this new challenge.
3. **Acknowledge** what other losses or changes may be occurring in your life, because they may further tax your emotional reserves and strengths.
4. **Recognize** you are the same person you have always been.
5. **Learn** from and share with others who have experienced visual impairment.
6. **Accept** the loss as a part of life, and begin to return to your normal responsibilities and activities.
7. **Pursue** special training to develop new skills and new strengths.
8. **Find** someone to talk with, such as a special friend, minister or rabbi, or counselor.
9. **Recognize** you may need to educate your family, friends, and acquaintances about vision loss. Their experience and knowledge may be limited, and your experience will help them begin learning.
10. **Find** out about community resources and services that are available to assist you. Just knowing about them can calm your fears and anxieties about what to do next.



Visit our adaptive aids store,  
**SightConnection** online 24/7.

We have over 400 products for living with vision loss —  
we are your local source for vision needs.

[www.SightConnection.com](http://www.SightConnection.com) or call (800) 458-4888, 9 AM - 5 PM, M-F

---

## **C•S•B•P•S**

### 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.

### **Community Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted**

9709 Third Ave NE #100, Seattle, WA 98115-2027

(206) 525-5556 (v/tdd)

(800) 458-4888 (v/tdd)

(206) 525-0422 (fax)

Email: [csbps@csbps.com](mailto:csbps@csbps.com)

Website: [www.csbps.com](http://www.csbps.com)

Adaptive Aids Store: [www.SightConnection.com](http://www.SightConnection.com)

Agency hours: 8 AM – 5 PM, M-F

SightConnection Store hours: 9 AM - 5 PM, M-F

*©2006 Community Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted  
Reprint or copy only with permission from CSBPS.*

***Support for this publication provided by the Alfred and Tillie Shemanski Trust Fund***