

Working with Parents with Sensory Needs 1-Minute Guide

Sensory impairment includes people with a sight loss or hearing loss or both. Many parents with sensory impairment can parent effectively without additional services. Others however need additional support both for their impairment and with aspects of parenting affected by their sensory issues.

Possible Indicators of Hearing Loss/ Deafness

- May communicate in Sign language or have different speech patterns.
- May use hearing aids
- May have visual alerts in home - flashing doorbells
- May avoid phone conversations
- May agree with everything being proposed and then carry none of the suggestions out.
- Children may be very keen/able to speak on behalf of parents.
- Parents may have unclear boundaries with children
- Complaints from neighbours about noise
- Use of louder speech as unable to moderate voice
- Missing parts of speech or difficulty hearing certain tones if an older carer

Possible Indicators of Sight Loss

- Adaptive equipment – talking / large print or tactile
- Use of mobility aids such as a cane
- Difficulties getting out and about
- Tripping on low items
- Different types of vision loss cause different problems e.g. night blindness, tunnel vision, visual field loss – so someone may be able to read but cannot see a lamppost on the pavement
- Bright or low lighting
- Children may 'guide' parents and may read to them

Possible Indicators of Dual Sensory Loss / Deaf Blindness

- Many of the above
- People may have some sight and / or some hearing but the combined effect of these impacts on their day to day living
- Dependence on others for support re guiding and communication
- Mobility aids are red and white to indicate hearing and sight loss
- Use of other methods of communication – e.g. tactile hands on signing or manual alphabet.

Working with Parents with A Sensory Loss

Parents may not be aware that they are missing things because of their sensory loss, or they may be concealing the extent of their sensory loss.

- Establish if the person has a diagnosis of hearing / sight loss and if you have concerns, encourage to be tested.
- Parents must have appropriate communication support for all visits / meetings this may include the use of interpreters or other communication aids – e.g. loop systems <https://inside.devon.gov.uk/task/providing-alternative-formats-and-communication-support/suppliers/>
- Written communication needs to be in plain English without jargon or abbreviations.
- Establish preferred format for communication - large print, braille, email.
- Consult with the Sensory team to ensure support services are appropriate and accessible to Deaf parents.
- Appropriate equipment solutions need to be explored to support with parenting role- tactile baby alarms for example.
- Equipment solutions such as labelling and measuring devices, talking alarms, musical potty.
- Consider the mobility needs for parents with sensory loss when out with children – navigating, safety, training and equipment. The challenges for visually impaired parents who use a cane or guide dog and have child in pushchair.
- Communication support is vital with people with dual sensory loss.

For people with sight loss, the Sensory Team (Devon County Council) has Rehabilitation Officers for visually impaired people (ROVIs) Social Workers with Deaf People and rehabilitation officers for People with Hearing Impairment. These workers can provide an initial assessment to ascertain the functional impacts of sight or hearing loss and identify which areas of help are required. This may result in a Rehabilitation programme covering daily living skills and practical childcare issues and / or mobility training and communication skills. Sensory staff can also signpost to appropriate agencies for further help and advice.

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/care-and-health/disabilities/physical-sensory/sensory-disability-services/>

Resources

There are several sources of help and support covering specialised or adapted equipment, technology, support groups, benefits, accessibility and leisure facilities.

The following organisations have useful info for visually impaired parents:

RNIB: online shop: <http://shop.rnib.org.uk/>

<http://www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-family-friends-and-carers/resources-blind-or-partially-sighted-parents>

Visionaware – American organisation but has some useful info on all aspects of parenting:

<http://www.visionaware.org/info/emotional-support/for-family-and-friends/introduction-to-blind-parenting-series/123>

The Communication toolkit on Devon County Council website provides information on how to produce other formats, such as Braille: <https://inside.devon.gov.uk/task/providing-alternative-formats-and-communication-support/suppliers/>

Action on Hearing Loss (formally RNID)

A source of information about Hearing loss and Deafness including benefits, communication support and assistive technology

<https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/live-well/products-and-technology/>