

Vision impairment and communication

Vision plays a big role in communication. Vision includes how the eyes and brain work together to allow a person to see.

Vision in communication

Some of the ways we use vision in communication include:

- seeing people's mouths, bodies, facial expressions, gestures or sign language
- seeing people coming in and out of a room, and knowing how far away they are
- seeing information on TV and the internet, and in books and newspapers
- seeing communication books, boards, or electronic communication devices.

About vision impairment

Some people cannot see very well. They might have problems with their eyes, their eye muscles, or the parts of the brain we use to make vision work.

Some people are born with vision impairments, while others develop an impairment as they get older.

There are many different ways that vision might work or not work.

Some people have partial vision or low vision. Some people do not have eyes that work at all. Both groups of people might be called 'legally blind', even though their vision is very different.

Most people with a vision impairment have some vision that they can use.

Problems with vision include:

- not seeing things clearly – the person might need glasses, or larger pictures or words
- not being able to see in front, to the sides or up and down – some people might only be able to see what is to one side of them, or they may have black spots that block what they see. Positioning things in different places can help
- eye problems that change depending on the setting the person is in – some people are sensitive to light. Colourful, familiar things that are moving might be easier to see. The person's vision can be affected by how tired or stressed they feel
- eye problems as a result of disability.

Communication and vision

Many people with communication difficulties have vision impairments. Sometimes, they do not realise they have a vision problem, or that they can get help to communicate better.

Lots of different people are involved in assessing vision.

For example, an **optometrist** might look at how clearly someone can see and whether glasses might help.

An **ophthalmologist** might look at whether the person has any eye diseases. They can help the person regain their vision, prevent their vision getting worse, or make better use of the vision that they have.

Other specialists include **orientation and mobility instructors** and **specialist teacher services** for people with vision impairments.

How speech pathologists help with vision impairment

A speech pathologist works with a person and their eye specialists to understand how their vision impairment affects their communication.

They can explore the changes that are needed in communication.

Changes might include:

- size and colour of text and pictures used in communication systems
- using other ways to communicate, such as braille and sign systems for deafblind people
- places and positions for other people to use when communicating with the person with vision impairment
- the sorts of cues that might be needed in words or touch to a person with a vision impairment.

Vision plays a big role in communication.

Speech pathologists help people understand what vision they have, and what they can do to communicate better.