

# Vision Impairment

This factsheet has been developed in consultation with key agencies with experience and knowledge in the specific areas. The information is provided for **guidance** only, allowing you to be more informed in your approach to being a more **inclusive** coach. No two people are the same, as such, please ensure your first step is to speak to the person – understand their **abilities** and goals and never assume.



## What is a vision impairment?

**Vision impairment** is a term used to describe any kind of **vision** loss, that impacts on a person's ability to carry out activities of daily living. Some people cannot see at all or some have partial **vision** loss.

Coaching people with vision impairments can provide many challenges as every person will have varying levels of sight. Some people may see nothing; some may see outlines; some may see some light or colour; some may see a small area in detail but nothing around that area; some may see best in good light; some in low light; some may have seen in the past and have a memory of how people move; and some may never have seen and have to learn everything by description, demonstration and experience. Some people may not see well under certain conditions or circumstances such as glare, fatigue etc

## What you may notice with people who have a vision impairment

Depending on the severity of the condition, a person with a vision impairment may have one or many of the following:

- Eyes make repetitive, uncontrolled movements. These involuntary eye movements can occur from side to side, up and down, or in a circular pattern. This condition is known as Nystagmus.
- Head tilting – ‘Null point accommodation’ is when a person may tilt their head to minimise the uncontrolled movements of the eye.
- Head swaying – a voluntary, learned, neurovisual adaptation to improve visual acuity.
- Gross motor skills not being as well developed.
- A lack of motivation to explore the environment.
- Being unaware of unacceptable body movements and mannerisms.
- Difficulties with orientation.
- Difficulty with depth perception and change of levels underfoot on surfaces.
- Need time to adjust when moving from darkness into bright and vice versa.

## How to include people with Vision Impairments in your coaching sessions

- Communication is key when coaching people with a vision impairment.
- Talk to the participant prior to the session, to understand their sight level and personal support needs.
- It is very important that trust is developed quickly between the coach and participant.
- It is important that the player is not over accommodated.
- Use the individual’s name to get their attention.
- Allow adequate time for the participant to orientate the environment and equipment, prior to the session and throughout.
- Always begin teaching any new skill or technique with verbal descriptions (try to paint a picture in participants mind) before moving on with the activity.
- Always ask if physical contact is wanted with a guide.
- Offer support instead of grabbing, pushing or pulling participant
- Allow time for tactile exploration of equipment and environment as well as continued verbal description.
- If possible, you, as the coach, should picture the skill and describe it as accurately as possible; communication and patience are key.
- Ensure a quiet learning environment so the participant is able to interpret, locate and identify different sounds.

- **Sound** - The use of equipment and cues with a **sound** can often help.

**Examples:** having a sound source that beeps to identify and orientate the direction of play or bells or beads within a ball itself to generate a sound etc.

- People with a severe vision impairment cannot learn by imitation. As this is the usual way in which most people will learn movement from an early age, be aware of using different methods of communication.
- Be aware that some people with vision impairment's sight may vary from day to day or at different times of day, going from dark to bright or vice versa. It is therefore important to check with your participant prior to each session.
- **Contrast** – use equipment that has a contrasting colour to that of the playing surface or background. Try use strong **contrasting colours** to help distinguish between playing surfaces, playing equipment and the participants. As the coach, you should wear a different coloured top, in a colour the participant can see
- The use of **tactile** markers on the floor, walls and equipment can be helpful, where appropriate.
- Tactile aids can also be used to assist the participant in identifying the playing area, direction of play and where balls or targets are located in relation to the participant etc.

**Examples:** using string/rope to mark the perimeter of the court in Goalball or flat rubber directional arrows or markers to orientate the direction of play, or a scaled down tactile model/version of the playing area/targets to give participant greater understanding.

- Avoid low-hanging objects in the coaching environment and keep the floor space free of any potential hazards or obstacles.
- Have relevant materials available in large print, braille or electronic form depending on the preference of the participant(s) with a vision impairment.
- In swimming, people with visual impairments may find backstroke difficult, and may feel very uncomfortable when starting to do backstroke. Ensure the participant has complete water confidence before backstroke is attempted.
- To fully understand the outcomes, some participants may need to experience practices, events and routines **repeatedly**.

## Useful equipment suggestions:

- Sound Sources
- Tethers



- Coloured Tapes
- Large Print



- Braille
- Bumpers



## Forms of Vision Impairment:

Explanation for the figures below: If somebody is 6/60 (Registered Blind in Ireland), they need to be at 6m to see what you can see at 60m.

- **Partially Sighted:** A visual impairment that adversely affects a participants' performance even when corrected to the extent possible.
- **Low Vision:** If someone's vision is between 20/70-20/160 and cannot be corrected, the participant has moderate to low vision.
- **Registered as Blind:** From 6/60 is registered blind in Ireland. From 20/400-20/1000 is profound vision impairment, and is very close to total blindness.
- **Totally Blind:** The lack of light perception is known as total blindness or total visual impairment.



For further information and support, please visit:

[www.ncbi.ie](http://www.ncbi.ie) or [www.visionsports.ie](http://www.visionsports.ie)

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