

Tips for Helping Seniors with Vision Loss

www.VisionAware.org

Vision loss can greatly affect the participation levels and safety of seniors experiencing difficulties with their vision due to age-related conditions such as diabetic retinopathy, cataracts or macular degeneration. As people lose vision they often isolate themselves and do not believe that they can still maintain an active, independent lifestyle.

Also, different eye conditions affect the ability to see and function in varying ways. For example, macular degeneration affects central vision and the ability to read, see faces, and drive. Glaucoma, on the other hand, affects peripheral vision. To learn more about how eye conditions affect vision, watch a vision simulations video in the eye conditions section of VisionAware.org

Ten tips to help you provide a friendlier, safer environment and the assistance and support that people experiencing vision loss may need. Find more tips on VisionAware.org

1. Control glare by using appropriate window coverings and adjustable lighting.
2. Increase use of contrast. Paint door trim, replace covers on outlets and light switches and put contrasting tape on steps.
3. Use bold, sans-serif fonts and white or light yellow paper for handouts such as activity calendars and high contrast, tactile signage.
4. Provide enlarged, tactile versions of games, eg. playing cards, bingo cards and board games. Such games are available through specialized catalogs. (See Resources)
5. When walking with a consumer with vision loss, offer your arm for the person to hold onto. Walk about 1/2 step ahead of the person so that you can avoid objects in the pathway. This assistance is called "sighted or human guide." This technique is outlined in the everyday living section on VisionAware.org.
6. Talk directly to a person with vision loss, eg. "What would you like to drink?". Do not talk around them to relatives or friends, eg. "What does "he" want to drink?"
7. Describe the place setting and food arrangement on the plate in terms of a clock face so the person can participate in meal time confidently.
8. Avoid use of throw rugs and low lying furniture to help prevent falls.
9. Use clear, verbal descriptions when giving directions and offer a tour of the facility, including how to find restrooms, to newcomers. Point out landmarks they can use to get around easily.
10. Make sure to announce changes you may make in furniture arrangement in public areas of the facility.



Resources for Living with Vision Loss

www.VisionAware.org

To find more tips and helpful suggestions for living with vision loss, go to VisionAware (www.VisionAware.org). Here you can find videos with critical information such as vision simulations; use of sighted guide, how to prevent falls, hearing and vision loss. You can also find links to products and catalogs and a retirement living checklist.

AFB's bookstore at www.afb.org/store offers courses and publications that can help you such as the eLearning Center featuring 21 online courses on aging and vision loss. ***Solutions for Success: A Training Manual for Working with Older People Who are Visually Impaired***. This manual was developed for use in retirement living facilities. Other helpful books include: ***Making Life More Livable***—a book on coping with vision loss, and ***Aging and Visual Impairment: A Handbook for Families***.

Visit the VisionAware service directory (www.visionaware.org/directory.aspx) to find vision rehabilitation local, state, and national service providers. You may want to schedule training with a service provider for consumers and staff to learn about sighted guide and vision-related services that can help with living with vision loss.

Here is a directory of some important resources:

VisionAware

www.VisionAware.org
1-800-232-5463 (information line)

Eye Care for Low Income Individuals:

Eye Care America

www.eyecareamerica.org
1-800-222-EYES (3937)

Vision USA

www.optometrycharity.org/vision-usa
1-800-766-4466

Talking Books

www.loc.gov/nls

Veterans Visual Impairment Service

www.va.gov/blindrehab
1-800-827-1000 (choose info about VA Medical Care)

Vision Rehabilitation Services Nationwide:

www.NCSAB.org

