active disability ireland

Factsheet

Vision Impairment



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 directly 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.

When coaching people with a vision impairment, it is important to recognise that everyone's experience is different. Some people may have no vision, while others may see shapes, colours, light, or a limited field of vision. Some may see better in certain lighting conditions, while glare, fatigue, or low light can make vision more difficult. Individuals who have lost their sight may draw on past visual memories, while those born with a vision impairment often learn through clear verbal descriptions, demonstrations, and hands-on experience.

What You May Notice With People Who Have A Vision Impairment

Depending on the severity of their vision impairment an individual may experience one or more of the following:

- **Nystagmus:** repetitive, involuntary eye movements that may be side-to-side, up and down, or circular.
- **Head tilting:** a strategy used to reduce the effects of nystagmus and improve vision.
- **Head swaying**: a learned movement that may help improve visual focus.
- Delayed or less developed **gross motor skills.**
- Reduced confidence or motivation to explore unfamiliar environments.
- Unawareness of certain body movements or mannerisms.
- Difficulties with **orientation and navigation.**
- Challenges with **depth perception** and detecting changes in surface levels.
- A need for time to adjust when moving between **bright and dark environments**.

How To Support 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.
- **Use the individual's name** to get their attention.
- **Allow adequate time** for the participant to orientate themselves to the environment and equipment before the session and throughout.
- Always begin teaching any new skill or technique with **verbal descriptions** (try to paint a picture in the participant's mind) before moving on with the activity.
- **Always ask if physical contact is wanted when guiding.**
- **Offer support instead of grabbing, pushing, or pulling** the participant.
- A**llow time for tactile exploration** of equipment and the environment, alongside continued verbal description.
- If possible, as the coach, **picture the skill and describe it as accurately as possible**; communication and patience are key.
- **Ensure a quiet learning environment** so the participant can 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.

• Tactile Aids

These 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.

The use of tactile markers on the floor, walls and equipment can be helpful, where appropriate.

• 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

- People with a **significant vision impairment may not be able to learn by observation or imitation**, so use a variety of communication methods when teaching new skills.
- Be aware that a participant's **vision can vary throughout the day** or in different lighting conditions. Check in with them before each session to understand any changes that may affect participation.
- **Keep the environment clear and safe**, avoiding low-hanging objects and removing potential trip hazards or obstacles.
- Provide information and resources in **accessible formats** such as large print or electronic versions, according to the participant's preference.
- In swimming, some people with vision impairments may find **backstroke challenging** or uncomfortable. Ensure they are fully confident and comfortable in the water before introducing backstroke.
- Some participants may benefit from repeated opportunities to practice and experience activities, routines, and events to build confidence, understanding, and skill development.

Useful Equipment Suggestions:

- Sound Sources
- Guide and Tether systems



- Coloured Tapes
- Large Print



- Bumpons (tactile markers)
- High contrast equipment e.g. balls, cones



Forms of Vision Impairment:

If a person has a visual acuity of **6/60** (the threshold for registration as blind in Ireland), they must be **6 metres away to see what a person with typical vision can see from 60 metres away.**

- **Partially Sighted**: A vision impairment that affects a participant's performance, even when their vision has been corrected as much as possible.
- **Low Vision**: Vision between **20/70 and 20/160** that cannot be fully corrected. This is considered moderate to low vision.
- **Registered as Blind:** In Ireland, a person with visual acuity of **6/60 or less** may be registered as blind. Vision between **20/400 and 20/1000** is considered a profound vision impairment and is very close to total blindness.
- **Totally Blind:** A complete absence of **light perception**, also referred to as total blindness or total visual impairment.



> **Vision Ireland** provides awareness training, resources, and guidance for coaches, staff, and organisations to support people with vision impairments. Visit their website to learn more: www.vi.ie