Flashcards Low Vision & Blind



- **These flashcards contain information about working with children with low vision in low resource areas.**
- **These Flashcards are made for the use of fieldworkers.**
- **These flashcards are based on the information about low vision from the RehApp.**

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The goals of the flashcards are:

- To meet the needs of people with disabilities and their families.
- To improve knowledge and skills of fieldworkers in providing basic (functional) rehabilitation services for people with disabilities and their families.
- To enhance participation in daily, family and community life.
- To improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and their families.
- To support you (as fieldworker) in the process of guiding a family by providing you with a resource you can keep with you on your phone (offline) or in your bag.

Index

Low vision & Blind

What can you do with these flashcards:

- To help guide your visits to families that have a family member with low vision.
- Make an inventory of the needs of the person with low vision and his/her family.
- Learn about the implications of a disability for the person and their family.
- Use them to do an assessment.
- Use them to set goals for a person with low vision.
- Use them to help you discuss interventions with the family.
- Use them to help you keep client records.
- Use them to help you monitor process.

Index:

Note: These flashcards contain information about low vision. The content is organised according to the ICF domains. These cards don't replace the knowledge and skills of doctors and therapists. We advice you to seek their advice first.

Information about low vision	
	Introduction
	Body functions & structures
	Activities & Participation
	Personal factors
	Environmental factors

Index

Low vision & Blind: content

Introduction:

- ❑ Introduction low vision
- ❑ Assessment

Body functions & structures:

- ❑ Rehabilitation interventions

Activities & Participation:

- ❑ Basic principles to improve functioning
- ❑ Stimulation and early child development
- ❑ Activities of Daily Living
- ❑ Mobility
- ❑ Education and Schooling
- ❑ Livelihood
- ❑ Social activities
- ❑ Sexuality

Personal factors:

- ❑ Personal feelings

Environmental factors:

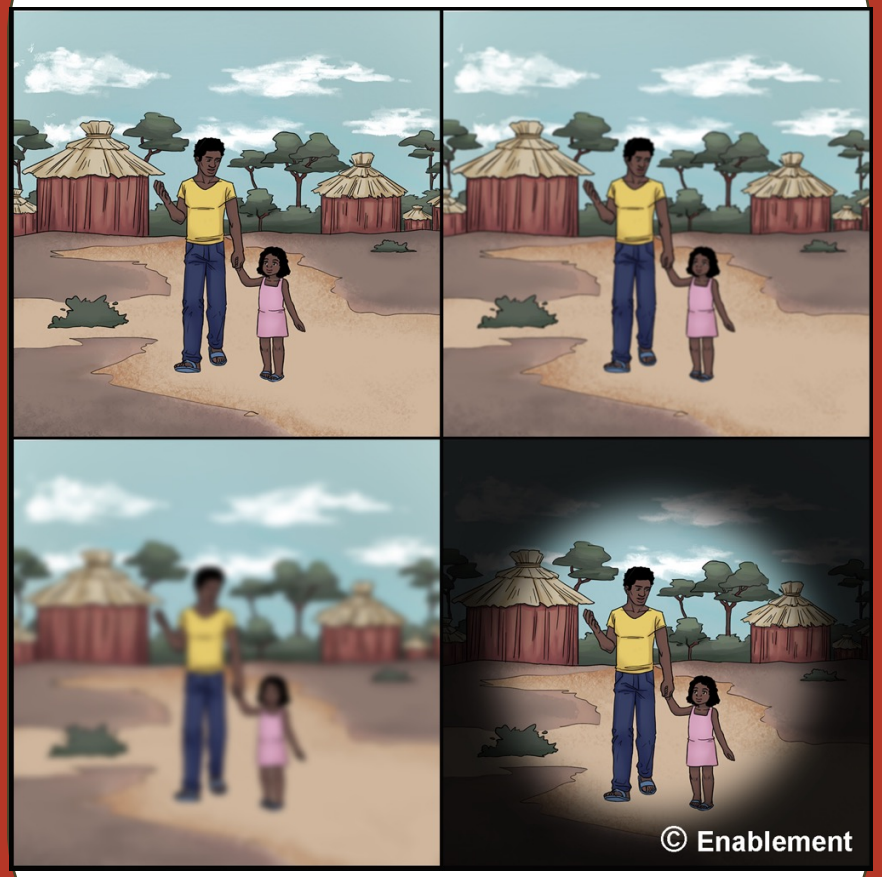
- ❑ Environmental adaptations
- ❑ Community attitudes
- ❑ Low vision devices

Card 1

Introduction

Low vision is an eye condition where the sharpness of vision is 6/18 or less. This means that a person with normal vision can see an object at a distance of 18 meters, while the person with low vision will need to come as close as 6 meters to see the same object. Low vision is an un-correctable vision loss; it cannot be improved by wearing glasses or contact lenses. It influences people's abilities to carry out daily activities and participate in community life. Low vision is therefore better defined in terms of function, rather than in terms of test results.

Low vision can also take the form of reduced peripheral vision: this is a part of the vision that only occurs on the side gaze. The person must move their head to be able to see everything around him. They especially face challenges in safely finding their way in traffic.



Introduction

Card 2





Causes of low vision

Low vision may be the result of:

- a sight defect from birth;
- an injury due to foreign objects or substances getting into the eyes, for instance metal penetrating or chemicals splashing in the eye;
- a medical eye condition or disease resulting in poor vision, such as: diabetic retinopathy (a condition caused by diabetic), glaucoma (group of eye diseases caused by high eye pressure causing damage to the optic nerve), cataract (clouding of the lens of the eye, usually related to the ageing process; occasionally children can be born with the condition; or a cataract may develop after eye injuries, inflammation), onchocerciasis (also called 'river blindness' - caused by a parasite and transmitted by blackflies in fertile riverside areas).
  Note: poor hygienic conditions strongly increase the risk of developing an eye disease, which may lead to permanent vision loss.

Low vision is not easy to recognise and diagnose as the problem is often not visible to others. Proper and timely diagnosis of eye diseases is essential to prevent the development of vision loss or blindness. Follow up is also important to treat eye diseases and to help the person stay as active as possible in family and community life. Ideally, this should be done by an eyecare specialist.

Note: this chapter mainly focusses on people with low vision, but some interventions might also be appropriate for people who are blind. Being blind means that a person only sees a maximum of 5% of what a person is seeing normally. People who are blind experience serious difficulties or cannot carry out activities of daily living without support.

Card 3

Introduction

Assessment

Suggested steps for doing an assessment by the fieldworker

1. **Interview** the person with low vision (and the caregiver) about their situation; ask about personal experiences and feelings, and inquire how the person having problems with vision performs his or her daily activities, participates in school or at work etc.



2. **Observe** the person's abilities and difficulties in performing daily activities or, for instance, while the child is participating in school or how the adult is coping at work. Also, look at the living conditions of the person with low vision, as many eye problems can result from unhygienic living conditions. **Note**: always refer to a health specialist at the first signs of eye disease such as redness, teary eyes or swollen eyelids!
3. **Measure** the eyesight of the person if you suspect reduced vision. This can be done by using a Visual Acuity (VA) chart such as Optotypes (letters, numbers or symbols) or Snellen "E" charts for illiterate people.
4. **Refer** the person to a trained eyecare specialist if reduced vision is identified with the VA chart. Ideally, this specialist is an ophthalmologist, ophthalmic clinical officer/ ophthalmic nurse or an optometrist, refractionist/ low vision therapist. They should determine the cause, type and effect of low vision to define appropriate activities to enhance visual abilities.
5. **Collaborate** with the eyecare specialist(s) for advice, support and follow-up of the person with low vision. Especially if the person receives glasses or low vision devices such as magnifiers, regular follow up is needed.

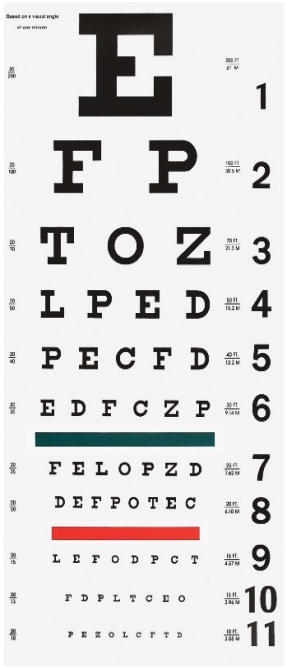
Card 4

Introduction

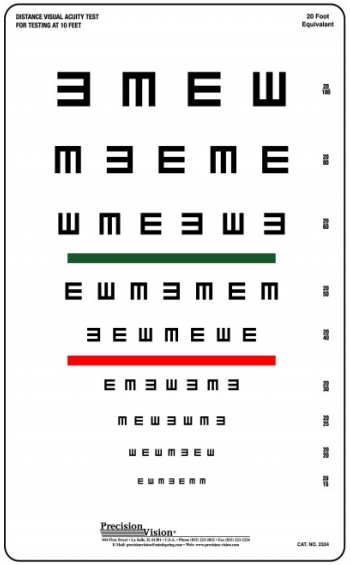
Visual Acuity (VA) test

The ability of a person to see well can be assessed by using a Visual Acuity chart and a Snellen "E" chart. A fieldworker needs training to carry out a VA test and needs the charts (equipment) to do so.

- **Visual Acuity (VA) chart**: this chart ideally contains letters and numbers. The first line consists of very large letters, while the last line consists of very small letters.



- **Snellen "E" chart**: this chart can be used for people who cannot read or for young children who have not learned to read yet. The person should point the direction of the "legs" of the "E" i.e. to the right, left, below or above.

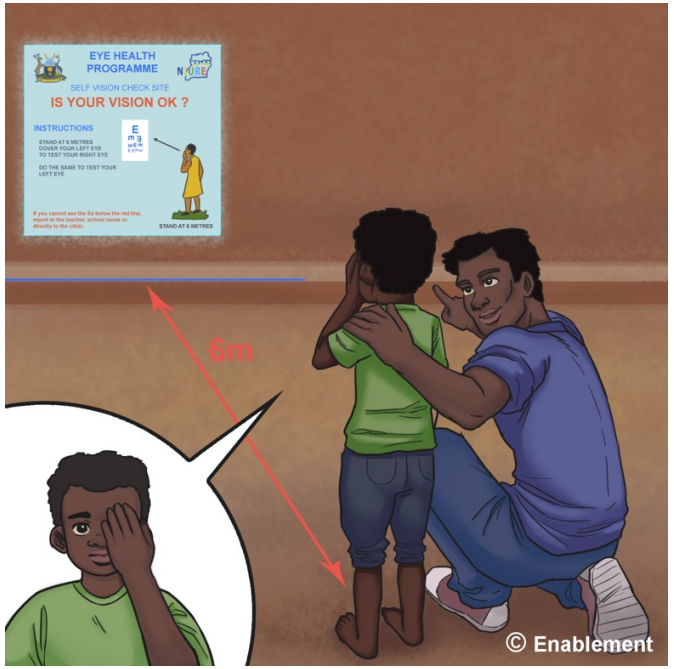


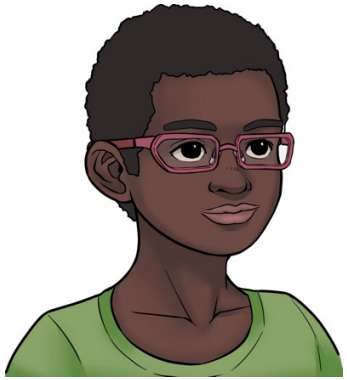
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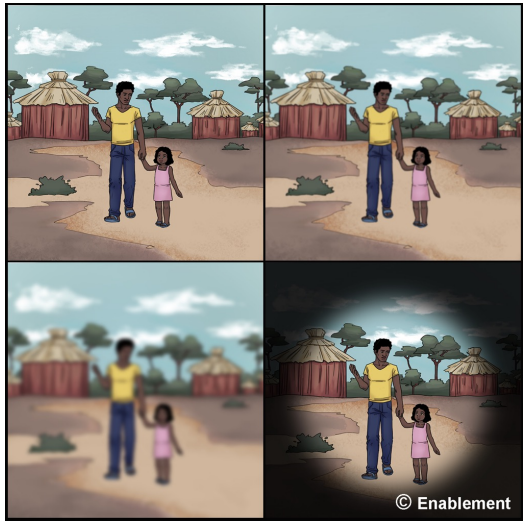
Introduction

Steps to follow for the Visual Acuity test

1. Explain the chart and its procedures to the person.
2. Place the chart on eye-height at a 6-meter distance from the person (if using a 6-meter chart).
3. Let the person cover their left eye with the palm so that they can only see with the right eye.
4. Let the person read starting from big letters/numbers or using Snellen “E” by pointing where the “legs” of the E are directed to. Then going down to the lines with smaller letters/numbers or “E”.
5. Record the line on which the person can still see with their right eye without mistakes.
6. Now repeat the same procedure for the left eye by covering the right eye with the palm.
7. Let the person read again starting from big letters/numbers or using Snellen “E” by pointing where the “legs” of the E are directed to. Then going down to the lines with smaller letters/numbers or “E”.
8. Record the line on which the person can still see with their left eye without mistakes.
9. If the person cannot read the letters/numbers down to the red line with each eye separately, there might be a visual problem. The person should be referred to an eyecare specialist.



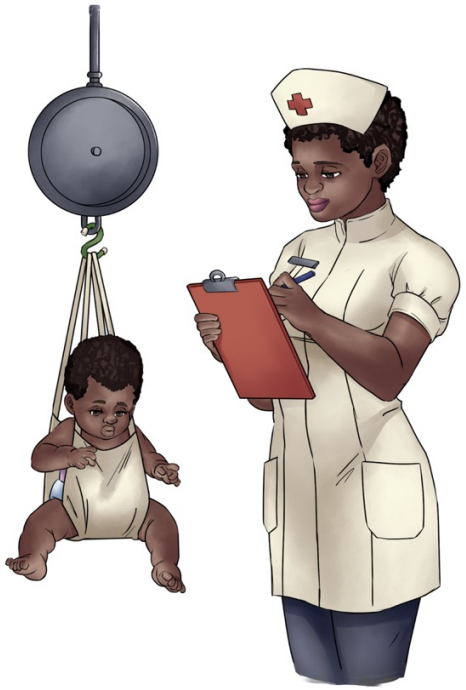


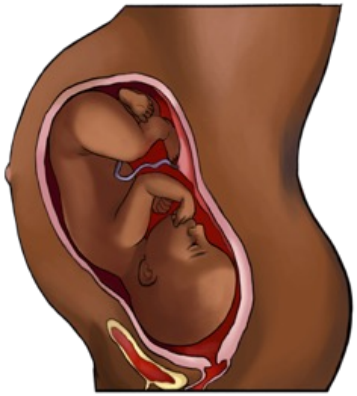




Body functions and structures:

Information and
Actions to take











Card 6

Body functions and structures

A person with low vision may experience difficulties:

- to recognise faces and objects;
- to read or do detailed work such as putting a thread through a needle or picking stones from rice;
- to distinguish colours;
- to safely interact with the environment, such as finding the way around the house or in the community;
- with mobility, such as crossing the road or participation in traffic when riding a bicycle.

Rehabilitation interventions

To be able to confirm that a person has low vision, fieldworkers should know how to measure eyesight by doing a Visual Acuity (VA) test. If low vision is identified, they should refer the person to an eyecare specialist. This specialist can diagnose the exact vision problems and identify appropriate rehabilitation interventions. These might include the following:

If a person has a blurred vision which is not corrected yet, then visual abilities can be improved with glasses or contact lenses.



If this is insufficient, low vision devices might help to enhance visual abilities and improve the level of functioning.

Enhanced lighting, protection from direct sunlight and contrast enhancement may also help to improve visual functioning.



If the above is insufficient, then the person should learn to adapt to the level of vision available.











Activities and Participation:

Information and Actions to take







Card 7

Activities and Participation

Basic principles to improve functioning

The ability to see is influenced by aspects such as light or darkness, being outside or inside a building, the time of day and whether the person is in a known or new environment. There are a few basic principles that help a person with low vision to better perform daily activities. Discuss these (and other preferences) together with the person with low vision, caregiver and other household members so everyone knows how best to act.

Note: if applicable, encourage the person with low vision to also discuss these principles at the workplace.

Actions to take

- Apply routines and structures
- Optimise lighting conditions
- Increase the colour contrast
- Use all senses

Apply routines and structures

The following actions are suggested:

- Always put utensils (plates, cups, pans etc.) back at the same place so that the person can find them easily by touch.
- Close doors to avoid the person hitting the open door that is turned towards them.
- Tell the person when entering or leaving the room, so that the person is not talking to others in vain or does not get scared due to sudden noises.
- Apply routines in day structure and try to always walk the same route, even if there are other or shorter routes.



Card 8

Activities and Participation

Optimise lighting conditions

The following actions are suggested to optimise lighting conditions:

- Avoid direct eye contact with the sun or other sources of bright light.
- Sit in the shadow while being outside or turn your back to the sun.
- Sit close to the light source when being in a dark room.

Note: be careful with open fires and candles. Solar-powered lamps might be safer to use and can be easily carried along.





Increase the colour contrast

The following actions are suggested to increase colour contrast:

- Contrast can be found in light intensity of colours and objects: dark against light. The bigger the contrast, the easier it is to be distinguished. For example, put coloured stripes on the edges of steps or place marked stones to indicate walk-ways.
- Good combinations are often: blue-yellow, red-yellow, blue-white, yellow-black.

Use all senses

The following actions are suggested:

- The less a person sees, the more they are aware of the other senses to make and understand the world. This includes senses such as hearing, touching, smelling and tasting.



Card 9

Activities and Participation

Stimulation and early child development

The development of children with low vision might be slower than that of other children due to the limitations in, for instance, recognising and handling objects. The child might need more time to learn to walk/run and explore their surroundings. Especially in school, children with low vision will have difficulties in learning to read and write. Early stimulation is very important as it will help the child to learn to cope with the effects of low vision and meet typical developmental milestones like walking, running, dressing, eating and play.

Actions to take

Encourage the caregiver in supporting a child with low vision:

- To move around, explore their environment and be given many objects to touch and handle.
- To use other senses like listening, touching, smelling and tasting. E.g. give a child a rattle or a small tin with some stones inside to beat and make noise.
- To write or draw in sand or mud so the lines can be traced by the child with their finger.







Actions to take (cont'd)

- To orientate by explaining what they are doing and saying the names of things, objects in the child's surroundings.
- To use musical instruments and singing or dancing, which stimulates the child to move around.
- To encourage children (with and without low vision) to play games together. For example, by putting various objects in a bag, which the children need to recognise by touch.









Card 10

Activities and Participation

Card 11

Activities and Participation

Activities of Daily Living

People with low vision can have difficulties and need more time to carry out daily activities such as dressing, cooking or cleaning. Also, they are more at risk of an injury, for example getting burned whilst cooking. To prevent them from harm, some families do not allow relatives with low vision to participate in these daily household activities. This is especially the case with children, whom some caregivers tend to overprotect. However, this hampers the child's ability to learn skills and develop confidence in participating and moving around in the house and the community.

Actions to take

Work together with the family to train a person/child with low vision to carry out daily activities themselves and in a safe manner. The following can be considered:

- Teach the person with low vision to put a finger in a cup when pouring water, to feel when the cup is full. **Note:** care should be taken when pouring hot water.
- Teach the person with low vision to recognise the front or back of clothes by touch.
- Encourage the caregivers of a child with low vision to involve them from an early age in daily activities in the home such as doing the dishes, washing clothes or help cooking.





© Enablement



Card 12

Activities and Participation

- Encourage the caregivers of a child with low vision to teach about the dangers of cooking fires and show them how to approach a potential hot item carefully to prevent injuries.



- Explore if low vision devices can help the person to do the activity independently.



- Look at how the environment can be adapted so that the person can carry out activities safely.



Card 13

Activities and Participation

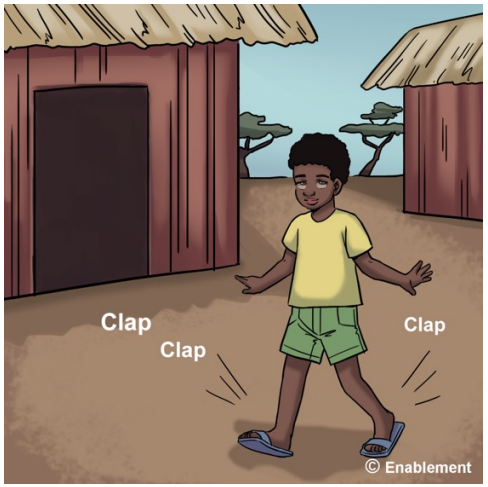


Mobility

People with low vision will need more time to find their way around the home and community. Being able to recognise and find a way in traffic can be challenging for a person with low vision. Especially fast-moving vehicles can hinder the ability to safely move around. Explore the challenges a person with low vision experiences in their mobility and together find out how to overcome these.

Main mobility challenges

1. **Orientation**: routes are best taught by jointly looking for clear orientation marks (e.g. a rocky road or a gate) and connect these marks to a complete route. Break down the route into segments, from marker to marker, and practice each segment in both directions. Note: ensure that these are permanent orientation marks!
2. **Obstacles**: obstacles (such as baskets) within the household setting should be taken away to avoid tripping over. Within other environments, the person should learn how to avoid unforeseen obstacles (such as traffic) by using mobility aids for example. **Note**: use all senses to gather information about the environment: sound, touch, smell. E.g. objects can be detected by the echo of the voice or the tapping of the feet.



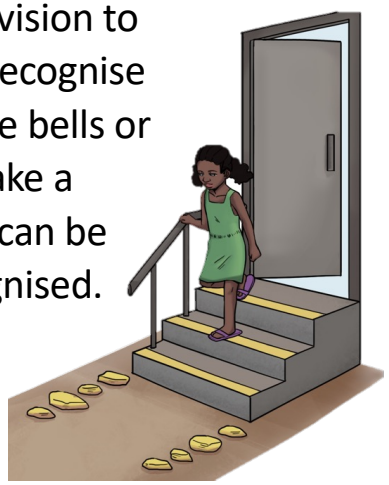


Card 14

Activities and Participation

Suggested actions to support mobility

- Practise mobility with people with low vision by walking around the home and the community. Start close to the home and, once the person can find the route well, go further into the community. Help the person familiarise themselves with the route by pointing out orientation marks and let them hear or touch these landmarks to be able to memorise the route.
- Create an improved contrast of walk-ways, using white/yellow stones against a red road or sandy path, or plant hedges along walkways.
- Mark the way to the toilet, bathroom or classroom with a rope and poles so that the person with low vision can hold the rope and follow the path.
- Attach bells, tins or stones to walls and paths along the way for a person with severe low vision to touch and recognise the way. The bells or tins also make a sound that can be easily recognised.





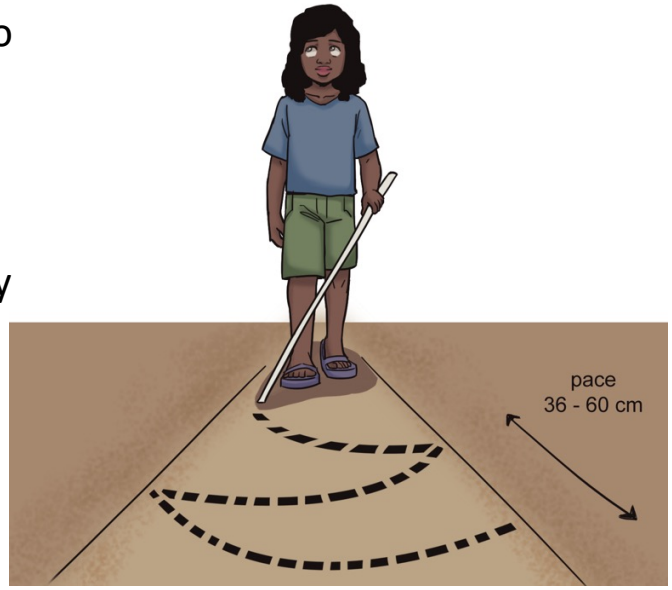


Card 15

Activities and Participation

Mobility aids

- **White cane -** as long as the distance from the floor to the armpit
  - Designed primarily as a mobility tool used to detect obstacles, ground-level changes and stairs in the path of a user.
  - Some white canes can be folded, these are easy to take along when traveling.
  - The cane can be tapped from left to right (a bit beyond shoulder width) while walking.
  - The tapping will give both tactile and audible information.
  - As the cane is white, others are notified about the low vision.



- **A sighted guide** – the caregiver or another person
  - Always ask the person first if they need help and how they would like to be assisted!
  - Let the person with low vision loosely hold the guide's elbow with the hand closest to the guide.
  - The person with low vision walks (a half) step to step behind the guide. Where there is insufficient space, let the guide go first.
  - Use words to warn the person about dangerous situations e.g. a speeding car.
  - Inform the person when stairs are coming up and whether the stairs go up or down.



Card 16

Activities and Participation

Education and Schooling

School children with low vision can experience challenges to participate and learn at school. At the same time, low vision is often not understood or recognised by teachers as there are usually no clear visible signs. Instead, teachers might think the child is not interested instead of understanding that the child cannot see well and therefore has difficulties learning how to read or write.

Teachers should be educated about the impact of low vision and how to provide an effective learning environment for children with low vision. Support caregivers to advocate for the inclusion of their children in local schools to ensure access to equal opportunities.

Classroom layout

Make sure to introduce the child to their surroundings on the first day at school, such as the classroom, toilets and other important rooms in the school. Also, pay attention to the following:

- Ensure the child with low vision sits on a chair at a table, close to the teacher and blackboard in the front of the classroom.
- Facilitate good lighting to enhance visual abilities; let the child sit by the window or outside in the sunlight for reading.



Card 17

Activities and Participation

Teaching methods and materials

Encourage teachers/ schools to adopt alternative education materials and ways to conduct educational assessments of children with low vision. For example:

- Enhance contrast when writing or drawing; use dark colours on whiteboards or white paper.
- Write in big letters on the blackboard and give oral instructions instead of a written handout.
- Dictate what has been written on the blackboard and explain visual materials e.g. when drawing pictures, describe the image.
- Provide touchable learning experiences. E.g. instead of talking about rocks give the child a real rock to touch and handle.
- Provide braille textbooks and handouts when available and if preferred by the child with low vision.
- Explain the use of page magnifiers to enlarge images and text.
- Let the child do an oral exam to avoid an unfair disadvantage due to a lack of vision.
- If necessary, give students with low vision more time to complete their work.
- Suggest to the teacher to create a buddy system or let the child with low vision pair up with a classmate who can support learning activities.

Braille

For people who are blind, a reading and writing system has been developed, called Braille. It consists of a system of raised dots that represents letters or numbers that can be read with the fingertips. Experienced Braille readers can read at the same speed as visual readers.

Note: Braille education is often only available at boarding schools for the blind. Children will have to live away from their family and the costs (both financial and emotional) are often high. The pros and cons should be carefully examined. Remember that there are many other ways that they can learn in school with support from the family, fieldworker and committed teacher.



Card 18

Activities and Participation

Livelihood

With the right support and environment, people with low vision can meaningfully work, sustain themselves and their families, and become productive members of society. However, they might need to be sensitised and supported to access vocational training or livelihood programmes such as loans and employment opportunities, as well as relevant social protection schemes.

People with low vision can also be encouraged to become fieldworkers in CBR programmes, teachers, or teaching assistants in local schools for children with low vision. This will help to understand the problems that people with low vision experience in their day to day life and promote inclusion .



Card 19

Activities and Participation

Actions to take

- Find out what type of work the person with low vision would like to do. Maybe they can play a role in existing income-generating activities of the family. Note: avoid job stereotyping like all blind people being suitable to become a masseur or basket maker.
- Refer people with low vision to vocational training programmes; support them in accessing these programmes and advise the providers to put measures in place to facilitate the active involvement of people with low vision.
- Identify job placement opportunities for people with low vision that match their interests and abilities.
- Raise awareness among local employers on the value of hiring people with low vision; help them overcome their prejudices and put in place measures that are needed, such as improved lighting, make sure there are no obstacles on the floor etc.
- Explore suitable ways to access employment opportunities e.g. with the use of mobility aids or by facilitating the development of shared means of transportation.
- Facilitate the development of local support and self-help groups for people with low vision and their families.
    - These groups can promote inclusion and participation in livelihood and employment opportunities.
    - Self-help groups can also develop savings mechanisms and income generation activities for people with low vision.

Card 20

Activities and Participation

Social activities

Participation in social activities such as cultural, sport and religious activities, might be challenging for a person with low vision. They easily are excluded from taking part in these activities or be an observer only rather than a participant. Fieldworkers can work together with the community to ensure that people with low vision have access to and are actively included in all community activities.

Note: participation in recreation activities such as music, singing or dancing, should not be a problem for people with low vision, because they can use their other senses such as sound, smell or touch to compensate for the lack of vision.





Actions to take

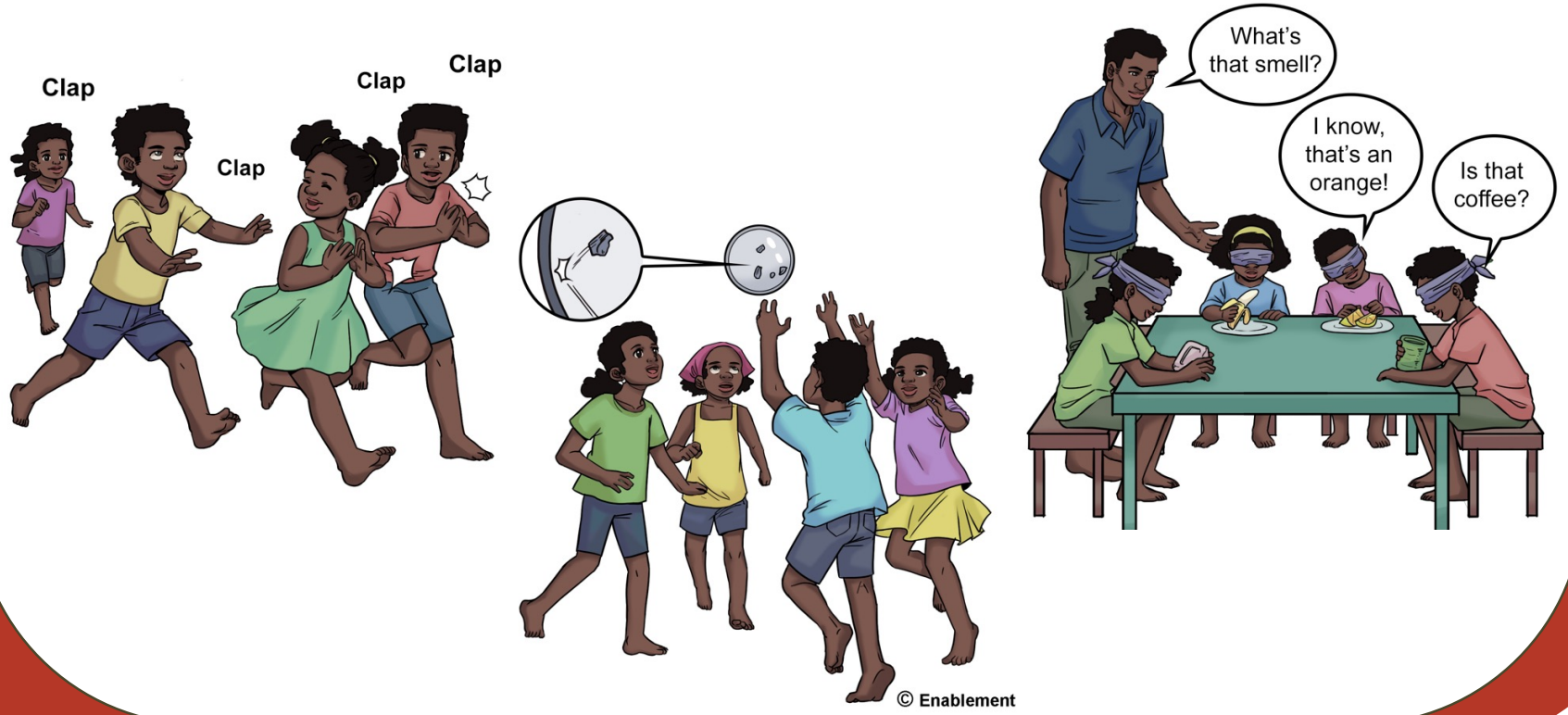
- Encourage the person with low vision to become active in the local community meetings or religious functions. For example, joining the choir, assisting during functions, etc.
- Raise awareness among community members on the fact that people with low vision can be active members of their community. Help them overcome their prejudices and put in place measures needed to increase accessibility.

Card 21

Activities and Participation

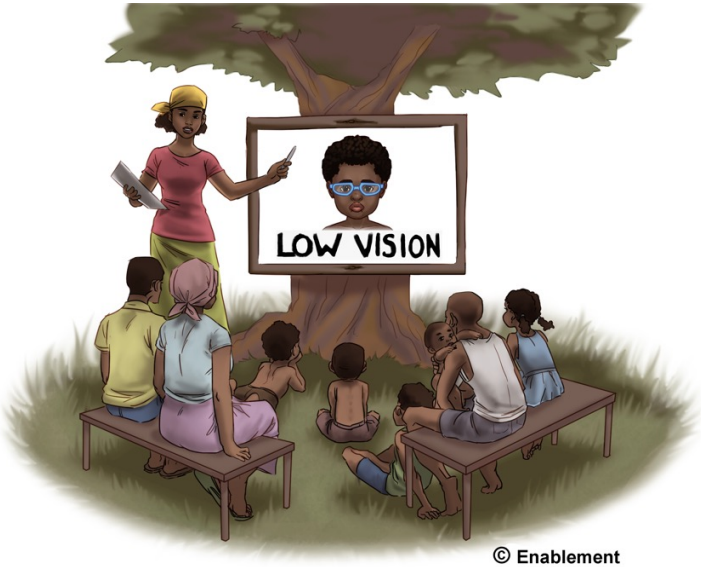
Actions to take

- Adapt games for people with severe low vision or blindness to enable their participation. Examples:
  - The players can clap their hands, use a whistle or attach bells to their feet or arms, so they can be heard when running and moving around.
  - A football with bells or seeds in it will make a sound and can be heard, or players give prompts when the ball is approaching.
  - Games can be played with children with normal vision blindfolded so all children have the same starting point.
  - Pairs can be made with a child with low vision and a child with normal vision playing together so they help each other.



Sexuality

People with low vision can have a regular, active and satisfying sex life like any other person. However, people with low vision may experience challenges and risks concerning sexuality due to existing barriers in society. Particularly girls and women are exposed to higher risks of sexual harassment and abuse within the family, the marriage/relationship and in the wider community. This exposes people with low vision to higher risks of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS.



Existing barriers

- Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education is sometimes a taboo subject in schools, even when it is part of the curriculum.
- Children with low vision may be excluded from SRH education due to inaccessible learning materials. They may still seek information on sexuality via other channels (for example the internet), but these sources may not be accurate and may lead to misinformation.
- While sexual desires are part of the human experience, family members of people with low vision (as well as people in the community) may think that people with low vision do not have (or should not) have sexual desires and cannot (or should not) be sexually active.

Card 22

Activities and Participation

Card 23

Activities and Participation

Actions to take

- Ensure sexual and reproductive health learning materials in school are accessible to people with low vision.
- Refer people with low vision to sexual and reproductive health programmes and family planning programmes.
- Raise awareness among family members and partners of people with low vision, as well as in the wider community, on the rights of people with low vision to a healthy sexual life.
- Identify potential situations of risks for people with low vision, especially for girls and women and put strategies in place to minimise the risks.
- Report violation of integrity such as rape and other forms of violence or harassment to the relevant authorities.











Personal factors:

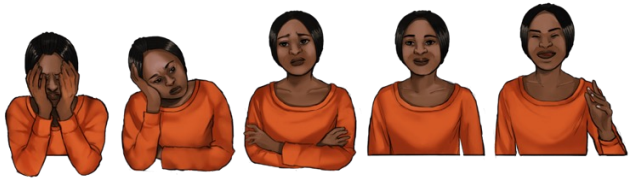
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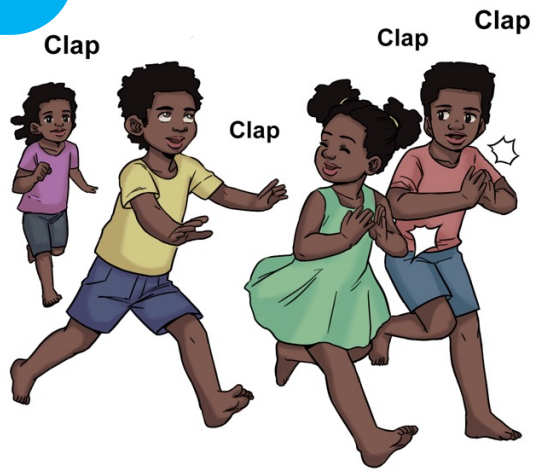
Actions to take











Card 24

Personal Factors

Personal feelings

Low vision can have a significant impact on the emotional wellbeing of the person due to different reasons:

- They often need more time to carry out daily activities which can lead to a lack of confidence and feelings of uselessness.
- Poor vision can cause other injuries, such as burns or falls which can lead to fear of carrying out activities independently or avoidance to go out.
- The inability or difficulties to read information (e.g. an invitation letter) may result in people being left out from community activities. This can lead to feelings of isolation.

People with low vision and their families need practical and emotional support to adjust to their (new) situation and identify suitable coping strategies.



Card 25

Personal Factors

Actions to take

- Help people with low vision understand and accept that asking for help and receiving support is okay.
- Stimulate the person with low vision to become part of a self-help group to exchange experiences and find emotional support.
- Work with families and the community to raise awareness and create more accessible environments for people with low vision.
- Provide emotional support, as well as practical training to caregivers on how to create more accessible home environments and provide mobility assistance.

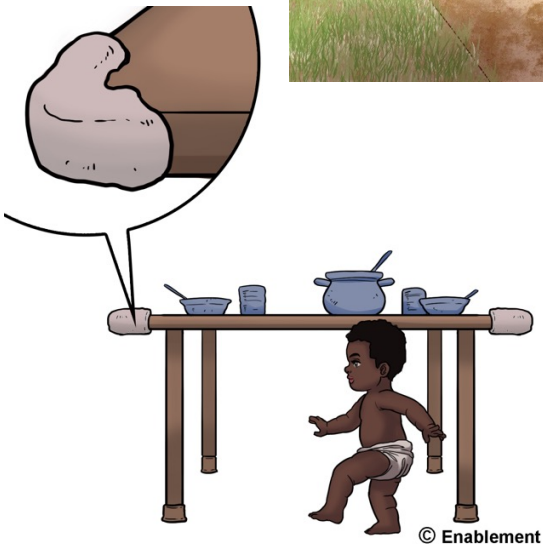


Note: people with low vision have a high risk of depression. Depression is a mental illness characterised by persistent feelings of sadness and a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, accompanied by an inability to carry out daily activities for longer periods. It can lead to a variety of emotional physical problems, such as a loss of energy, a change in appetite, problems with sleeping, feelings of worthlessness and thoughts of self-harm or suicide. When these signs are noticed, refer the person to a mental health specialist, social worker or religious leader.









Environmental factors:

Information and

Actions to take









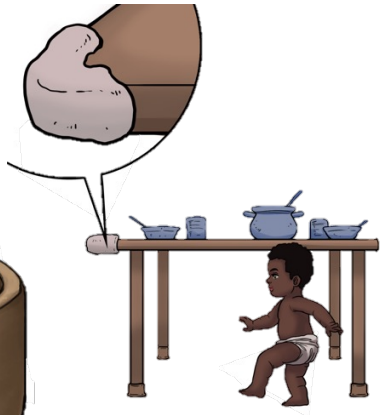
Environmental adaptations

The natural surrounding affects the abilities of a person with low vision to safely move around. For example, a child with low vision who lives in a big city might have more difficulties reaching school than a child who lives in a small town. Lack of vision can increase the likelihood of injury, as the ability to identify obstacles and hazards is reduced.









Actions to take

Assess the environment for potential risks or hazards and teach the person with low vision to recognise and work around the obstacles within the household and community. If necessary, make adaptations to the environment.

- Create easy to recognise walk-ways by marking the route with e.g. coloured stones or a rope.
- Ensure that paths are stable and flat, and clear of obstacles to reduce the chance of getting an injury.
- Remove loose items one can easily stumble upon in and around the house, as well as sharp objects which can hurt someone.
- Teach and explain how to avoid obstacles on the street (such as traffic, streetlights etc) e.g. by using a white cane or guide.
- Train the person to cook safely without assistance e.g. by using stable cooking pots to avoid the risk of burn injury. Fence off cooking places in families with children with low vision.

Card 26

Environmental Factors

Card 27

Environmental Factors

Community attitudes

One of the biggest challenges that people with low vision face is the lack of understanding from those around them. They are often treated by others as either unable, unwilling or clumsy. This has to do with - among others - the following issues:

- The fact that low vision is not easy to recognise by others.
- The lack of information and understanding by the community about low vision and how to interact with these people.
- Lack of provisions or adaptations to enable people with low vision to participate equally in the community.

Actions to take

- Try to overcome negative attitudes by raising awareness in the community about the causes and nature of low vision , as well as possible solutions to increased participation in community life.
- Stimulate the person with low vision to become an active member of local self-help groups and/or DPOs and together, advocate for their rights and change possible negative attitudes.
- Assess if the environment is accessible and adapt if necessary.



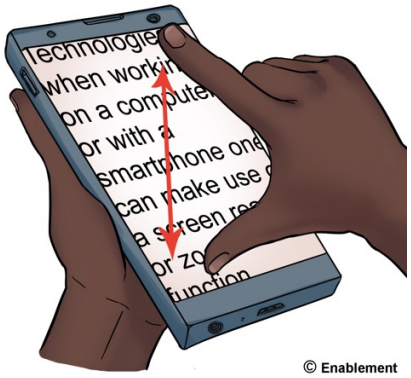
Card 28

Environmental Factors

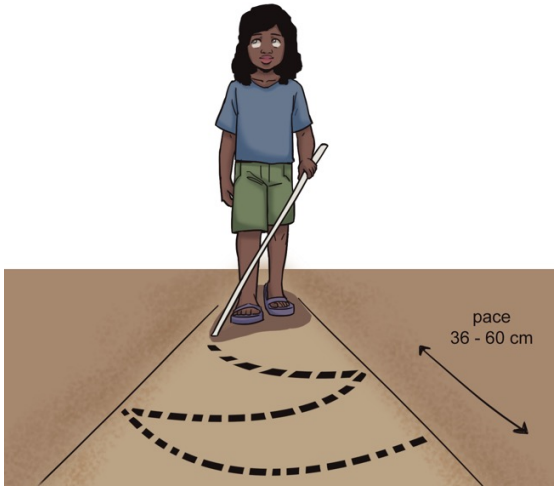
Low vision devices

A person identified with low vision that cannot be corrected with glasses may benefit from using low vision devices to retain good levels of functioning and independence. These might include the following:

- **Mobility devices**: these enable people to move around within the house or outdoors. It includes different types of canes or a guiding person.
- **Vision enhancement devices**: these can be used for reading and include electronic and hand-held magnifiers.



- **Lighting**: to enhance visual performance one can best do activities in day-light settings or make use of (portable) lights.
- **Technologies**: when working on a computer or with a smartphone one can make use of a screen reader or zoom function.







A CBR programme can advocate for appropriate low vision services at health centres and hospitals as close to the community as possible. These centres can provide needed vision enhancement devices.

Card 29

Colophon

For the development of the Low vision chapter of the RehApp, we particularly want to express our gratitude for the valuable contributions of Annemarie Gindorfer & Wolfgang Gindorfer (Light for the World), Imran Khan, Andrea Pregel & Sandeep Buttan (Sightsavers) and Evert Veldman.

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