

# How to be **eye care** aware

Eye care essentials for people  
with learning disabilities.

**A guide for families and support workers.**



## An equal right to sight

Eye care is extremely important for people with learning disabilities. Good eyesight enables us to learn, communicate and feel more confident. It supports personal development and lets us take part in more of what life has to offer.

# 10x

**More likely**



The reality is that adults with learning disabilities are 10 times more likely to have serious sight problems. For children the figure is even higher as they are 28 times more likely so it's important for eye care to start at a young age.



## A regular sight test

A sight test is the only way of keeping track of eye health and vision. Due to the increased likelihood of eye problems everyone with a learning disability should have an eye test every two years. Some people may need one more often.

# 50%

**Not getting enough eye care**



What makes matters worse is that many people with learning disabilities are not getting the eye care they need. SeeAbility's research suggests that a shocking 50% of people with learning disabilities have not had a sight test in the last 2 years.

# How can people with learning disabilities make sure they get the eye care they need?

There are many reasons why people with learning disabilities are not getting the eye care they need. Here are some ideas for overcoming these barriers:



## Having an eye test should be a priority

Good eye health is vital, being able to see well can open the doors to lots of opportunities. It's essential to know how well people can see so they can be supported to make the best use of their vision.



## No one is too disabled to have an eye test

Everyone can and should have an eye test. Some people may need extra support but this does not mean they cannot be tested. There are many ways to plan for a successful eye test:

- Visit the opticians in advance to familiarise with the new environment
  - Talk about or look at pictures of the eye test at home before the day of the test
  - Plan the best day and time to have an eye test
  - Explain what parts of the test people will feel ok with to the optometrist
  - Understand that the tests can be adapted and glasses can be prescribed just from shining a light to measure the eyes
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## **Making reasonable adjustments**

Don't be shy to ask for extra support as people with learning disabilities have the right for reasonable adjustments to be made. These could include:

- Creating a friendly and welcoming environment to help lessen any stress
- Explaining or demonstrating the tests before doing them
- Using picture instead of letter tests for people who have difficulty reading
- Using different or adapted tests that don't need a response or choices to be made
- Doing the test somewhere familiar such as at home, school or in a day centre
- Offering an appointment at a quieter time for the practice to avoid waiting and when more time may be available



## **Support to wear glasses**

It's best to get glasses supplied and fitted by a qualified optician and to return to them if there are any problems or they get broken - don't wait until the next eye test. Some people will need time and support to get used to wearing glasses and to look after them.



## **Eye care and glasses should be affordable**

People who receive some benefits or have a low income and children under 19 in education should not have to pay for an eye test or basic glasses. Ask at the opticians practice for more information. Some people may choose to buy more expensive glasses or need to shop around for the right type of glasses.

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## You can't tell if someone has a sight problem

Remember, you may not know if someone has a sight problem. There may be no obvious signs of poor eye health or even sight loss. This is why SeeAbility recommends that everyone with a learning disability has a sight test every two years.

In some cases family or support workers might notice a change that could indicate an undiagnosed sight condition:

- Pulling objects very close to their eyes
- Squinting
- Becoming less interested in reading or looking at things they may have looked at previously
- Lack of co-ordination and bumping into things
- Behaviour change, such as being more withdrawn or frustrated or not recognising people.
- Rubbing or poking eyes
- Unusual eye movements or the eyes not looking straight



### Better to get it checked



If you are in any doubt, get it checked. And remember that people with learning disabilities should have regular sight tests at least every 2 years.

## 'I am honestly embarrassed'

'I recently discovered some of the people we support have been needing glasses for years. I am honestly embarrassed. It never occurred to us they might have sight problems. Now we make sure that everyone has regular sight tests.'

Simon, senior support worker



## Seeing better equals doing better at school

No-one realised Nathaniel was very short sighted until he had a sight test. Anything more than a few centimetres away was just a blur.

Now he has the right glasses, he is happier and more independent. He recently learned how to ride his bike for the first time. He is also doing better at school. According to head teacher Kay Charles:

**"When Nathaniel couldn't see properly, he became distracted, which led to challenging behaviour. Now his confidence is growing and he feels part of the class."**



These are the essential things to think about when supporting people with learning disabilities.



## Think vision

People with learning disabilities are much more likely to have sight problems. But many are not getting the eye care they need.



## Have a sight test at least every 2 years

You often can't tell if someone has a sight problem. The only way to know for sure is a regular sight test.



## Wear the right glasses – and look after them

6 in 10 people with learning disabilities need to wear glasses. People need the right glasses for the right task and support to get used to wearing them. Glasses should be kept clean and well maintained.

## Get the right support

The right support to manage eye conditions and live with sight loss is essential. This could include:

- Access to treatments and eye surgery
- Support to make the best use of someone's vision
- Specialist equipment and support for people living with sight loss

**SEE ABILITY**  
Extraordinary every day

### Vision Passport

Information about my sight

Please fill in my Vision Passport and share it with those who support me. It will help you understand me and how you should support me.

**Part 1**

My name is

Please call me:

This profile was written with me on  (date)

Please review this profile with me after 6 months (planned date)

**About My Eye Tests – everyone should have an eye test every 2 years or more often**

My most recent eye test was on  (date)

My next eye test is due on  (date)

For results of my last eye test please read my "Feedback from the Optometrist" form

# Getting ready for an eye test

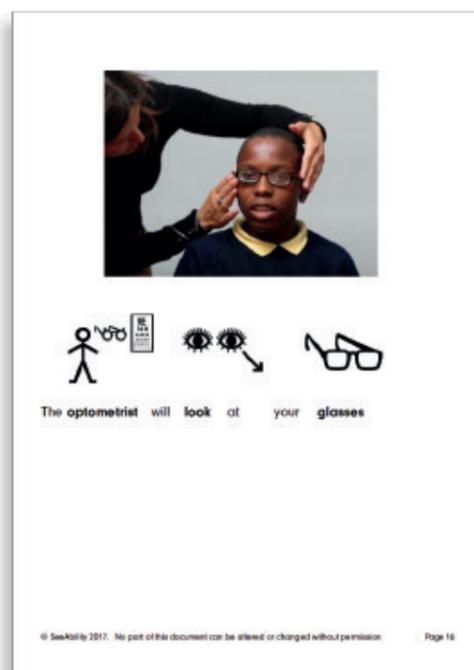


## Find an optometrist

A local community optician can do the eye test and should be able to test anybody with a learning disability with the right approach. Let them know about any reasonable adjustments needed when booking the appointment. SeeAbility has a database of optometrists and the adjustments they can make. There are opticians who can do home visits.

## Getting ready for the appointment

It can be useful to spend a little time preparing for the appointment. SeeAbility provides a range of accessible information which explains the process.



## What to tell the optometrist

Knowing what to tell the optometrist can help in getting more out of the appointment. For example, it would be useful for them to know about previous eye care or any medication taken, see any glasses worn now or in the past and if parts of the test may be difficult.

## Ongoing support with vision

After the eye test, ask the optometrist to fill in the 'Results of my eye test form'. This is useful for anyone in a person's circle of support who may need to know about their eyes and vision such as doctors, teachers, employers or support workers.



# About SeeAbility

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SeeAbility provides extraordinary support and champions better eye care for people with learning disabilities and autism, many of whom have sight loss.

## We provide extraordinary support

SeeAbility provides highly specialist support to people with learning disabilities or autism and other complex physical and sensory impairments.

We have one of the best in-house teams of specialists in the country, which means each person gets the right expert attention they need, when they need it.

Our approach is person focused and gets extraordinary results, so the people we support can live more independently, more actively involved with their communities and making more choices about their everyday lives.

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## We champion better eye care

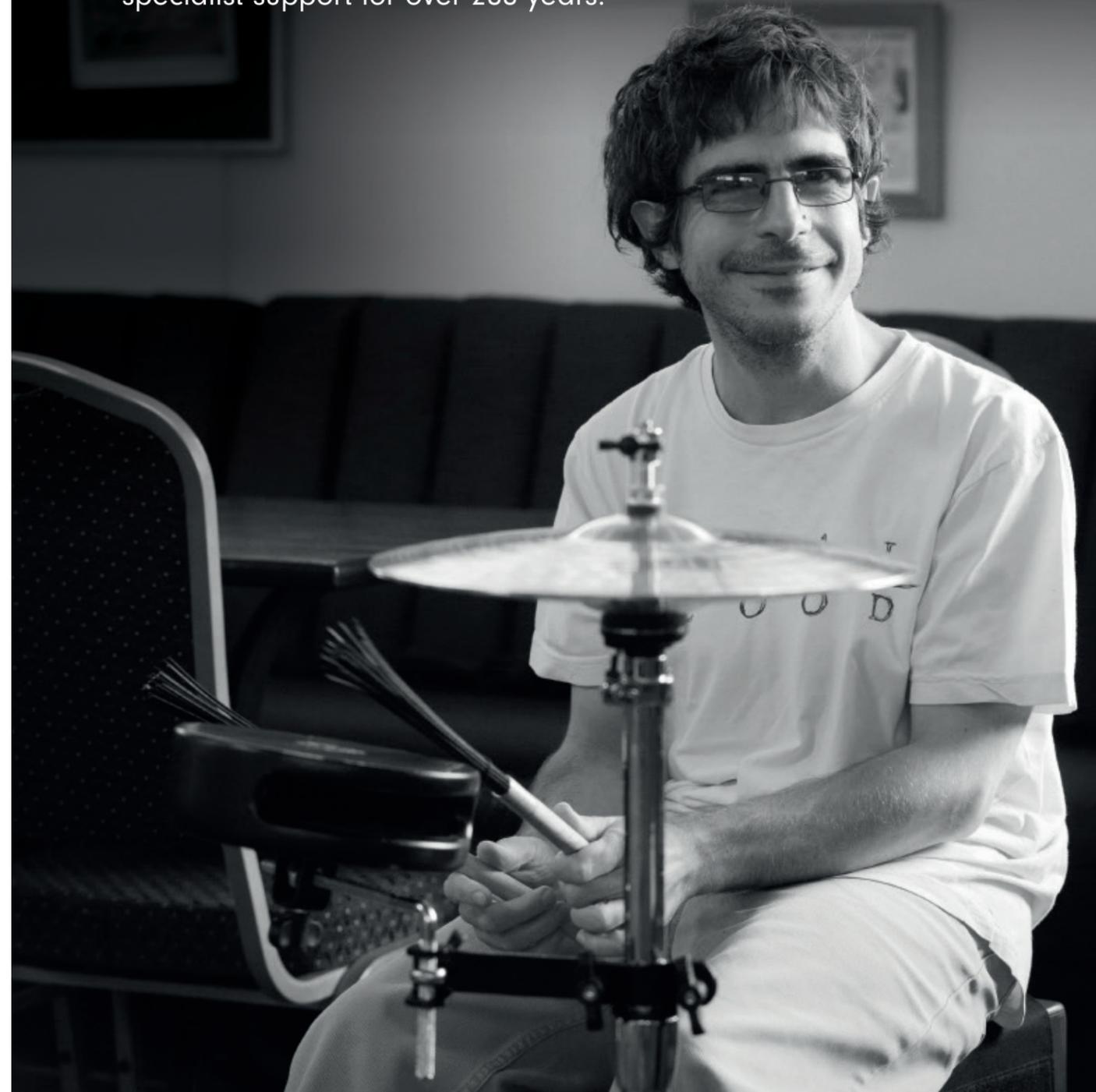
SeeAbility is tackling health inequalities in eye care in several important ways, by:

- Providing expert information and advice through awareness raising, peer to peer education and free downloadable resources
  - Improving the lives of over 1,000 children in special schools with specialist sight tests and support with glasses
  - Changing the way the eye care system works through our research and campaigns
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## We don't underestimate people.

We encourage people with disabilities to challenge what they expect from life, from themselves and from wider society. The people we support overcome huge barriers to achieve exciting new things every day: some big, some small, all extraordinary.

Registered as The Royal School for the Blind, SeeAbility is one of the oldest disability charities in the UK and has pioneered specialist support for over 200 years.





## More information on our website

SeeAbility's website has lots of easy read information and factsheets about eye tests, glasses and eye conditions in relation to people with learning disabilities. Visit [SeeAbility.org/looking-after-your-eyes](https://www.seeability.org/looking-after-your-eyes) for more information.

## Your gift makes all the difference

Help us ensure everyone gets the eye care they need by donating at [SeeAbility.org/donate](https://www.seeability.org/donate)



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