

Functional Vision Assessment

A resource to help understand how people with learning disabilities use their vision.



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Introduction

Good eyesight enables people to learn, communicate and feel more confident.

Shockingly, [our research](#) suggests that people with learning disabilities in the UK are far more likely to have serious sight problems and less likely to have had a sight test.

A Functional Vision Assessment (FVA) can be a very useful tool to find out more information on how someone uses their vision. SeeAbility's FVA tool is intended to be used by supporters of people with learning disabilities who know that person well, such as family carers and support staff. The FVA tool can also be beneficial for professionals working in the eye care or learning disability sectors.

This FVA is an observational tool that can be used to recognise how a person with learning disabilities might be using their sight and to inform professional advice. It can give an indication of what a person might not see or might have difficulty seeing. An FVA can be very useful before someone attends an eye test or eye clinic appointment to help identify problems that may or may not be treatable.

This may help inform the clinician as to whether a condition should be treated (for example prescription glasses or operate on a cataract). If a problem cannot be treated then the FVA can be used to develop strategies to support someone in adapting to their visual limitations. The FVA will also help carers and supporters to monitor a person's vision between eye tests.

How to use the FVA Tool

The FVA tool is made up of 5 sections, these are:

- About the person you support
- How do the person's eyes look?
- Signs and symptoms
- Assessment
- Taking action

Complete each section with as much detail as possible. Please use the notes boxes to give more detail and note anything you're unsure of. Don't forget to share the FVA with eye care professionals.

About the person you support

Person's name:

Date of last sight test:

Has the person been prescribed glasses?

Is the person wearing their glasses?

How does the person communicate?

Does the person have any thoughts on their own eye health? For example, "My eyes are sore" or "I can't see".

If the person has visited the hospital eye clinic or had eye surgery, please write the approximate dates and the name of the eye condition:

Your name and role:

How do the person's eyes look?

Sometimes, the appearance of a person's eyes can tell us something about their eye health and vision.

Look at the person's eyes and go through the checklist below.

Observation

No eyes at all – if yes, there is no need to continue with the FVA

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Very small eyes

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Closed, partially closed or droopy eyes or eyelids

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Eyelids rolling in or out

Yes **No** **Not sure**

In-growing eyelashes

Yes **No** **Not sure**

The white of the eye looks red, bloodshot, swollen or sore

Yes **No** **Not sure**

The white of the eyes looks yellow

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Sticky eyes, possibly with discharge

Yes **No** **Not sure**

The pupil appears mis-shapen or incomplete

Yes **No** **Not sure**

One or both eyes turned in or out (squint)

Yes **No** **Not sure**

The eyes look milky or cloudy

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Eyes that move constantly

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Eyes that bulge, seem pointed at the front or have an unusual shape

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Eyes appear scarred or damaged

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Cysts, lumps or styes on the eyelids

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Watery, weeping or dry eyes

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Anything else that appears unusual

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Notes

Include additional information, such as if both eyes are affected or if vision is worse at particular times of the day.

Signs and Symptoms

Sometimes, people's behaviours are related to problems with their eyes of vision. Take time to observe the person's everyday behaviours.

Use this checklist to record your observations and describe them as much as you can.

Head and eye movements

Frequent touching of eyes such as poking or rubbing

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Unusual head positions

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Moves head to look at things but eyes do not move much

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Turns head frequently when looking for something

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Unusual head movements, for example frequent head shaking

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Head rolling - circular movement of head

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Exaggerated head movements

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Constant/frequent frowning

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Constant/frequent blinking or screwing up eyes

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Notes

Include additional information, such as if both eyes are affected or if vision is worse at particular times of the day.

Light and glare

Blinks/shields eyes at bright lights

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Avoids bright lights and sunlight. For example they don't like going out when it is sunny

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Turns off lights or draws curtains when indoors

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Puts hands in front of eyes as if 'shielding' them from the light

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Struggles when going from dark areas to bright areas and bright areas to dark areas

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Often has head bowed away from sources of light

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Hesitates or is reluctant to leave the house when it is dark

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Is tentative or hesitant when moving into shadows from daylight, or into daylight from shadows

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Movement and mobility

Anxious or unwilling to walk or move alone

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Constantly looks down when moving

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Using hands to trail walls when walking or moving

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Has difficulty judging steps and kerbs; often trips up or appears unconfident

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Bumps into doorways or furniture

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Objects and recognition

Not appearing to recognise people

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Holds objects to the side to see them

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Brings objects closer to observe them

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Appears to lose sight of object when trying to pick it up

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Unable to find object directly in front of them

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Difficulty recognising faces

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Problems with small print or small objects

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Takes a long time to find objects

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Has problems seeing something that is pointed out in the distance

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Appears to have difficulty finding all food on a plate

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Often knocks things over such as cups and bottles

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Often doesn't appear to see people approaching

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Appears to see some objects and colours better than others

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Does not always see objects passed to them

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Does not appear to see all objects on a table, including meals

Yes **No** **Not sure**

The person blinks when an object appears suddenly near to their eye

Yes **No** **Not sure**

The person consistently misses things on one side (left or right)

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Miscellaneous

Withdrawn from groups or favourite activities

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Choosing to sit very close to the TV

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Does not like to sit close to the TV and choosing to sit further back

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Difficulty with self-care skills

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Difficulty with communication skills - difficulty learning sign language

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Poor concentration or attention with visual tasks

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Dramatic changes in behaviour - may become upset or anxious for no apparent reason

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Not making eye contact with people

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Startled by noises

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Vision appears to vary in different situations

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Appears to have some problems seeing, but close or detailed vision seems to be good

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Jumps or is surprised when approached from one side

Yes **No** **Not sure**

When watching television, the person sits very close or watches it using the corner of their eye

Yes **No** **Not sure**

The person turns their head to look at you with their side vision or appears to be looking away during conversations

Yes **No** **Not sure**

The person sees you better when you wear brightly-coloured clothes

Yes **No** **Not sure**

The person enjoys using different colours in painting and craft work

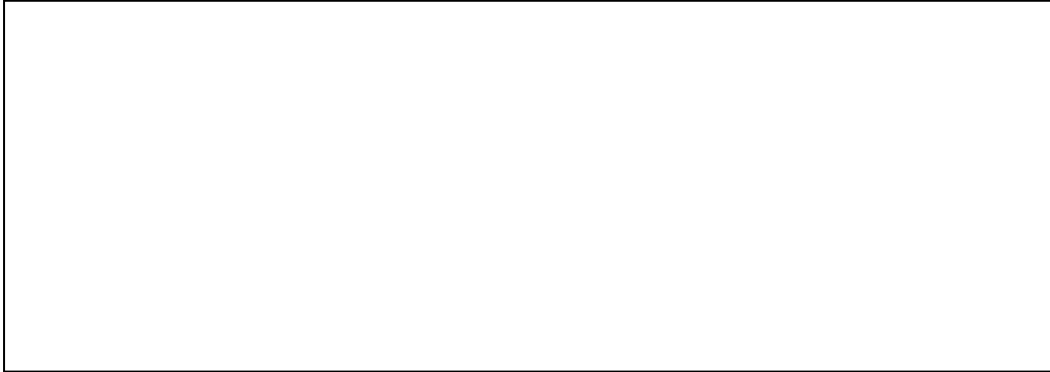
Yes **No** **Not sure**

The person enjoys choosing and wearing different coloured clothing

Yes **No** **Not sure**

Notes

Include additional information, such as if both eyes are affected or if vision is worse at particular times of the day.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide additional information as instructed in the text above.

Assessment

Take some time to try out these simple tasks and observations with the person you support.

These tasks and observations may give more information about how the person sees.

Head and eye movements

Observe the person's head position when watching television

Observe whether the person turns their head a lot to see other people in group situations

Cover each eye in turn with a hand or cloth and note the person's reaction. If this unsettles the person, you may be covering their "good eye" and they may be unable to see well with their other eye. This is especially true if the person does not object when the other eye is covered

Light and glare

Observe the person when they wear sunglasses, peaked cap or visor - does it help?

Observe if the person is happier to go out when it is sunny/not sunny

Observe the person when sun light and glare are reduced by partially drawing the curtains or adjusting window blinds

Observe whether the person bows their head in darker areas as well as bright areas

The person is happy to go out when it is light but not when it is dark

Movement and mobility

Observe if the person bumps into doorways

Observe if the person bumps into people in busy crowded areas

Observe if the person has difficulty on steps or stairs

Observe the person negotiating steps with painted edges. Does it improve their confidence?

Observe the person going through doorways where the colour contrast is good/bad. Does the person find it easier going through doorways where the colour contrast is good?

Objects and recognition

Give the person an object. Where do they hold it to look at it?

Ask the person or observe how the person picks up an item from a table

Walk up to the person, without using your voice, observe if they recognise you

Ask the person to look at a picture, observe where they hold it

Observe the person at meal times, can they identify or locate what is on their plate?

Put an object on the side of a table and observe how the person looks for it

Observe whether the person appears aware of objects and people outside of their central vision

Bring an object of interest (quietly) from behind the person and observe when they first notice it. Repeat this for both sides

Experiment with good and poor levels of colour contrast between the person's cup and the table. Does the person find it easier to see the cup when there is good colour contrast?

Experiment with coloured cups instead of clear glass. Does the person find it easier to see with a coloured cup?

Ask the person to name colours of objects or select an object of a specified colour

Try passing objects to the person from left and right. Do they side one side easier?

Ask the person to locate objects scattered on the table in front of them

Try to approach the person from the left and right side. Do they find one side easier?

Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI)

Cerebral Visual Impairment (commonly referred to as CVI) is a form of visual impairment caused by the brain not being able to process information from the eyes passing along the visual pathways in the brain.

Many people with learning disabilities may have symptoms of CVI but have not been formally diagnosed. Use the questions below to explore the possibility of the person having CVI. This information should be discussed at the person's next eye health appointment for further investigation.

Further information can be found here:

[Ulster University](#)

[CVI Scotland](#)

[The CVI Society](#)

The person has problems seeing fast moving objects

Never **Rarely** **Sometimes** **Often** **Always**

The person has problems finding one item amongst many items

Never **Rarely** **Sometimes** **Often** **Always**

The person finds copying words or pictures time consuming and difficult

Never **Rarely** **Sometimes** **Often** **Always**

The person has problems finding an item in a supermarket (for example, finding the breakfast cereal they want)

Never **Rarely** **Sometimes** **Often** **Always**

The person has difficulties walking downstairs

Never **Rarely** **Sometimes** **Often** **Always**

Taking action

Now that you have completed the FVA, you will need to decide what action to take.

People with learning disabilities are more likely to have serious sight problems than other people. A sight test is the only way of keeping track of someone's eye health and vision. [Research](#) suggests that everyone with a severe learning disability should be assumed to have a visual impairment unless proven otherwise.

SeeAbility recommends that everyone with a learning disability should have an eye test every year. Use the options below to find out what you should do next.

I have completed all checklists and have no concerns about the person's vision or eye health.

In this instance, continue to support the person to have regular eye tests to monitor their ongoing eye health. Remember that everyone with a learning disability should have an eye test every year. Sharing the findings of your functional visual assessment will be very useful to the eye care practitioner so please make sure you show them the completed FVA.

I have completed all checklists and I have some concerns which are described in the notes.

You should now support the person to seek advice from an appropriate eye care professional. Remember to take this completed FVA with you to help them. Everyone with a learning disability should have an eye test every year

You can find our easy read [factsheets on eye health, eye tests](#) and much more on our website.

Here are the links to our resources that may be helpful following this Functional Vision Assessment:

[Results of my eye test](#)

[Having an eye test \(easy read\)](#)

Summary of your findings

“I have used this twice and found it to be very helpful and comprehensive.”

Clare, Community Learning Disability Nurse

“Simple, Straightforward and Clear”

Carol, Support Worker

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

If you require any guidance or support in completing this Functional Vision Assessment please [contact us](#).

Additional copies can be downloaded from seeability.org/fva. The SeeAbility website provides information and advice to:

- Eye care and vision professionals on the needs of people who have a learning disability.
- Those who support people who have a learning disability on the importance of eye care and vision.



www.seeability.org



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