

What is a Visual Impairment?

The term visual impairment is also a continuum and those who are labeled VI may be partially sighted, just enough visual loss to receive support, they may have low vision, may be legally blind, or totally blind meaning there must be another means for learning rather than printed text.

How does a Visual Impairment Affect a Student's...

Development: Depends on the severity, type of vision loss, age at which condition appears, and overall functioning level of the child. Students with visual impairments lack interest to explore objects in the environment and may miss opportunities to have experiences to learn. A visual impairment can create obstacles to independence.

Learning: Students with VI use other sensory information to learn about the world around them. Teachers can support concept development by providing meaningful opportunities for hands-on interactions with real items.

Performance: Technology in the form of computers and low-vision optical and video aids enable many VI students to participate in regular class activities

Social Interactions: Due to not seeing, a student may be unable to imitate social behavior or understand nonverbal cues.

Tips to help a student with a VI access, participate, and succeed with inclusion:

- Organize materials and furniture-keep them in consistent places.

- Get student input-they often know what their needs are. Get family input as well, they can provide suggestions and strategies.
- Meet with a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) and an orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist and other professionals who may provide ancillary support.
- Resist physically guiding a student, provide specific verbal directions and use clear and precise terms to aid students' orientation.
- Familiarize yourself with assistive technologies and know who to contact with questions.
- Read aloud what is written on the whiteboard and describe all pictures, diagrams, and graphs shown on the board.

References for further information:

The American Foundation for the Blind has several resources including educational interventions and effective teaching practices: <http://www.afb.org/>

Penny R. Cox and Mary K. Dykes wrote the article, *Effective Classroom Adaptations for Students with Visual Impairments* found online at: http://www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/AboutCEC/International/StepbyStep/ResourceCenter/ClassroomEnvironment/VOL.33NO.6JULYAUGUST2001_TEC_cox.pdf

More Tips from the Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired: <http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/strategies.htm>

