



Functional Vision Assessment

**A resource to help understand vision for
people with learning disabilities**

Functional Vision Assessment Tool

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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. This FVA is an observational tool that can be used to recognise how a person with learning disabilities might be using their sight. It can give an indication of what a person might not see, or have difficulty seeing. An FVA can be very useful before someone attends an eye test or eye clinic appointment to 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, and 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	Yes/No	Notes
No eyes at all – If Yes, there is no need to continue with the FVA		
Very small eyes		
Closed, partially closed or droopy eyes or eyelids		
Eyelids rolling in or out		
In-growing eyelashes		
The white of the eye looks red, bloodshot, swollen or sore		
The white of the eyes looks yellow		
Sticky eyes, possibly with discharge		
The "pupil" appears mis-shapen or incomplete		
One or both eyes turned in or out (squint)		
The eyes look "milky" or "cloudy"		
Eyes that move constantly		
Eyes that bulge, seem "pointed" at the front or have an unusual shape		
Eyes appear scarred or "damaged"		
Cysts, lumps or styes on the eyelids		
Watery, weeping or dry eyes		
Anything else that appears "unusual"		

Signs and Symptoms

- Sometimes, people’s behaviours are related to poor 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.

Signs and Symptoms	Notes
Frequent touching of eyes - such as poking, rubbing	
"Unusual" head positions	
Moves head to look at things - but eyes do not move much	
Turns head frequently when looking for something	
Unusual head movements - for example, frequent head shaking	
'Head rolling' - circular movement of head	
Constant/frequent frowning	
Constant/frequent blinking or screwing up eyes	
Blinks/shields eyes at bright lights	
Avoids bright lights and sunlight Doesn't like going out when it is sunny	
Turns off lights or draws curtains when indoors? Always or when it is sunny?	

Signs and Symptoms	Notes
Puts hands in front of eyes as if "shielding" them from the light	
Struggles when going from dark areas to bright areas and bright areas to dark areas	
Often has head "bowed" as if looking away from sources of light	
Hesitates or is reluctant to leave the house when it is dark	
Is tentative or hesitant when moving into shadows from daylight, or into daylight from shadows	
Short attention span or seems uninterested in other people or surroundings	
Poor self-care skills	
Poor communication skills - difficulty learning sign language	
Dramatic changes in behaviour - may become upset or anxious for no apparent reason	
Not appearing to recognise people	
Not making eye contact with people	
Startled by noises	

Signs and Symptoms	Notes
Anxious or unwilling to walk alone	
Constantly looks down when walking	
Using hands to trail walls when walking	
Withdrawn from groups or favourite activities	
Choosing to sit very close to the TV	
Does not like to sit close to the TV and choosing to sit further back	
Holds objects to the side to see them	
Jumps or is surprised when approached from one side	
Brings objects closer to observe them	
Appears to 'lose sight' of object when trying to pick it up	
Unable to find object directly in front of them	
Limited/no eye contact	
Difficulty recognising faces	
Problems with small print or small objects	
Avoiding close up work and activities	

Signs and Symptoms	Notes
Takes a long time to find objects	
Appears to have some problems seeing, but close or detailed vision seems to be good	
Does the person have problems walking down the stairs?	
Does the person have problems seeing fast moving objects?	
Has difficulty judging steps and kerbs; often trips up or appears unconfident	
Does the person have problems seeing something that is pointed out in the distance?	
Does the person have problems finding an item of clothing in a pile of clothes?	
Does the person find copying words or pictures time consuming and difficult?	
Does the person leave food on the right or left side of their plate? Appears to have difficulty finding all food on a plate	
Does the person have problems finding an item in a supermarket (for example, finding the breakfast cereal they want)	

Signs and Symptoms	Notes
Often knocks things over such as cups and bottles	
Bumps into doorways or furniture	
Often doesn't appear to see people approaching	
Appears to see some objects and colours better than others	
Does not always see objects passed to them	
Does not appear to see all objects on a table, including meals	
Vision appears to vary in different situations	
Exaggerated head movements	
Does the person blink when an object appears suddenly near to their eye?	

Assessment

- Take some time to try out these simple tasks with the person you support.
- These tasks may give more information about how the person sees.

Task	Notes
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?	
When watching television, does the person sit very close or watch it using the "corner of their eye"?	
Does the person turn their head to look at you with their side vision or appear to be "looking away" during conversation?	
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	

Task	Notes
Observe the person negotiating steps with painted edges- does it improve their confidence?	
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	
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	
Bring an object of interest (quietly) from behind the person and observe when they first notice it. Repeat this for both sides	
Does the person seem to struggle with glare from the computer screen?	
Observe the person when they wear sunglasses, peaked cap or visor- does it help or hinder how they move around?	
If the person is thought to be sensitive to light, reduce the lighting in brightly-lit areas by using less powerful bulbs, ensuring the bulb is covered by a shade or turning down the dimmer switch. (Make sure that this does not adversely affect other people!)	

Task	Notes
Is the person 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	
Is the person happy to go out when it is light but not when it is dark?	
Does the person hesitate when stepping into or out of shadows?	
Experiment with good and poor levels of colour contrast between the person's cup and the table	
Experiment with coloured cups instead of clear glass	
Observe the person going through doorways where the colour contrast is good/bad	
Does the person see you better when you wear brightly-coloured clothes?	
Does the person enjoy using different colours in painting and craft work?	
Does the person enjoy choosing and wearing different coloured clothing?	

Task	Notes
Can the person name colours of objects or select an object of a specified colour?	
Try passing objects to the person from both sides	
Is the person consistently missing things on one side? (Left or Right?)	
Can the person locate objects scattered on the table in front of them?	
Does the person tend to see you better when you approach from one particular side?	
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	

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. Everyone with a learning disability should have an eye test every 2 years, or more often if advised. 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. 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.

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:

Telling the Optometrist about me

www.seeability.org/optom

Feedback about my Eye Test

www.seeability.org/feedback-optom

Having an Eye Test

www.seeability.org/having-an-eye-test

Testimonials

"I have used this twice and found it to be very helpful and comprehensive." – Clare, Community Learning Disability Nurse

"It's a really comprehensive, user friendly tool to assess a person's functional vision" – Karen, Clinical Nurse, Sensory Impairment Service

"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 www.seeability.org/fva. The SeeAbility website which 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.

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