

henshaws

beyond expectations

TIPS, TRICKS AND TECH
— for —
DATING WITH SIGHT LOSS



henshaws.org.uk

WELCOME

Dating and relationships can feel overwhelming, for sighted and blind people alike.

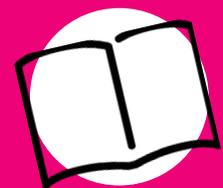
Questions like “Where should we go?”, “What do we talk about?”, and “What do I do if I’m not feeling the ‘spark’?” affect everyone, but relationships and dating for a visually impaired (VI) person can have its own set of barriers; from inaccessible venues for dates, to dealing with the changes that sight loss can bring to a relationship’s dynamics.

This resource is here to;

- ✓ help alleviate some of the stress of the dating world and relationships
- ✓ tackle misconceptions on dating and sight loss
- ✓ share advice and stories from others going through similar experiences as you.

ABOUT HENSHAWS

Henshaws is a charity that supports people living with sight loss and a range of other disabilities to achieve their ambitions and go beyond expectations.



This eBook is part of **Henshaws Knowledge Village**; a place to share our knowledge and expertise with those experiencing or working with sight loss and disability. Visit our **Knowledge Village** and explore our free resources; covering everything from apps and technology, to our handy Life Hacks videos.

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MEETING PEOPLE

Getting over the hurdle of meeting people is tricky for anyone, so we'll cover some of the best tips and suggestions we've heard over the years - from meeting people at groups, to online dating.



Meeting people naturally

With around 60% of 18-34 years olds having met their partners through friends or in a social setting, it seems that meeting the old fashioned way is still the preferred option for dating.

So how can you best meet people, and what are the extra challenges for visually impaired people?

AT BARS AND CLUBS

Bars or clubs can be difficult – although by no means impossible! - places to meet people for someone with low vision.



The dark, atmospheric lighting can make it a challenging place to navigate, especially if you haven't been before. It also makes it harder to read body language and other subtle hints that someone may be dropping from across the room.

If you find yourself struggling with these problems when looking to meet someone, bringing a friend can be a good way to tackle these issues. They'll be able to guide you when needed, and also hopefully help pick out someone across the room shooting you glances.

MEETING THROUGH FRIENDS



People tend to hang around others who share similar interests, so if someone has lots of mutual friends, there's a good chance that you'll share personality traits and other interests too.

Being friends with people before you get into a relationship is also useful for avoiding a potential pitfall of 'not knowing what you're getting yourself into'. Since they're already your friend, you know each other's flaws and you know what your dynamic is like.

HOBBY GROUPS AND EVENTS



Hanging out at a group event or a hobby group is a great way to meet people. You've already got something in common, which provides a great starting point for the conversation.

Since you'll be seeing each other on a fairly frequent basis, it also lets you get to know them as a person before deciding to go out on a date, which is another great advantage.



"I often say, love will happen when you least expect it. A number of my ex-girlfriends have come from work or sport. You never know where you might find someone. You just have to get out and do things. Keep busy, try new things that you enjoy and maybe you will find someone with similar interests."

MARC, @MRWGULWELL1

ONLINE DATING AND APPS

Online dating has become an integral part of the digital age. In fact, 1 in 5 relationships start online!



Meeting people online reduces the role that luck or geography plays in dating, and it can open up a whole new world of potential matches. We review some of the most popular dating apps and websites, and how well they fare with accessibility.

BUMBLE

The app presents you with a person's profile, and you then have the option to swipe left if you are not interested, and swipe right if you are. It has the unique characteristic that the woman has to send the first message.



Bumble also has a 24-hour feature; where you must message your match in 24 hours, otherwise the match will expire permanently.

Pros

Bumble is free (with some additional payable features), and uses Facebook to sign you up, which is easily accessed and a quick way to start up your profile. By having women take control, it can also help to tackle some of the hassle that women have had on other sites.

How accessible is it?

Not very. Bumble is practically inaccessible for a user with screenreader software as it's not compatible with VoiceOver, and very few of the buttons are labelled.



TINDER

One of the most popular dating apps on the market. Like Bumble, the app presents you with a person's profile where you can swipe right or left to show your interest in a possible match.



Pros

It's incredibly popular (around 12 million matches a day!) and free to use. Like Bumble, the app uses Facebook to sign you up, so it automatically lets you know of any mutual Facebook friends or interests, which helps paint a picture of the kind of person you're matching with.

How accessible is it?

Tinder is mostly compatible with VoiceOver, so you can generally use it independently with a screenreader. There are some issues; photos are not outfitted with alt-text, and several buttons are unlabelled. The sliders to change the age range and distance, located in the settings, are also incompatible with VoiceOver – so you may need someone (that you trust!) with you to help set up your initial account.



“Sometimes I use Tinder with my mum or my friends and they’ll describe the photos like ‘yeah, he looks like your kind of guy’. But sometimes I’ll do it by myself and base it off their bio, their education, their info, our interests, and all that kind of stuff.”



MOLLY BURKE, YOUTUBER

MATCH.COM

Match.com is the godfather of the dating site world. It's been in business since 1995, and has over 13.5m visits each month.



Like OkCupid, it has an in-depth questionnaire that takes roughly 30 minutes to complete. The questionnaire is broken down into three main sections, “about me”, “about my match” and “in my own words”; which aim to provide information about appearance, interests, lifestyle, and background.

Pros

It has a large and varied database, with over 1.7m paid members. It also has a 6-month guarantee that you will find someone – if you buy a 6-month subscription and haven't found someone special in that time, you get another free 6 months.

How accessible is it?

Match.com is currently being sued for its inaccessibility for visually impaired users, as one customer encountered numerous accessibility barriers including lack of alt-text, inaccessible forms, lack of clear navigation links, improper labelling, and more.

This could possibly instigate a change through Match.com, making it more accessible in the near future.



“Everybody assumes that blind people date other blind people, which a lot of blind people do, but a lot of blind people don’t!”



MOLLY BURKE, YOUTUBER

OKCUPID

OkCupid has over one million active monthly users, providing a wide pool of potential matches for users.



The matching system is innovative; requiring you to answer questions on what you find most important. These results are then extrapolated and used to provide you with a list of your best matches in compatibility, based on your answers.

Pros

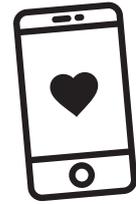
Whereas Tinder and Bumble are primarily image based, OkCupid focuses on personality and compatibility. Its users are also engaged with the app, with a majority of users creating bios and helping you to get a sense of their personality before going to message them.

How accessible is it?

OkCupid fares relatively well. Voiceover reads over its entire page elements, the majority of its buttons are clearly labelled, and the only buttons that are left unlabelled are seemingly of little use.



SPECIALIST DATING SITES



There are dating apps and websites that are strictly for disabled or blind people only, or explicitly discuss disability in the sign-up process.

- These specialist sites can help you to meet others who have gone through similar experiences, or help remove any pressure about ‘revealing’ your sight loss, since it’s already established and the relationship can move from there.
- They will usually also be designed to be more accessible than their mainstream counterparts.
- However, because these are niche dating websites, they will usually have a more limited user pool.
- Some users may also feel uncomfortable with the focus being on sight loss, or with the idea that someone without a disability has gone out of their way to date someone with a disability.



“It’s a lot more comfortable to date other VI people, they already understand the issues so there isn’t that elephant in the room on the first date. You don’t have to explain in gory detail what happened to your sight and you don’t have to tell them exactly what you can see.”

MARC, @MRWGULWELL1

“I find many of the dating sites unfriendly or not wanting to help the disabled, even the ones for the disabled. As soon as their money or project is over they stop monitoring them.”



ADRIJANA, FOUNDER OF THE FACEBOOK GROUP [‘VI SINGLES’](#)

Of course, it's all up to personal preference on what site or app to use - they all have advantages and disadvantages.

We've rounded up some of the most popular disability dating sites, and what sets them apart from one another:

WHISPERS4U

Whispers4U has been running since around 2002. It has the ability to share photos, live chat with webcams, and search thousands of disabled singles in a safe community.

It also works in partnership with Channel 4's show "The Undateables".



DISABLED DATING 4 U

Disabled Dating 4 U has been running since 2009, and has recently extended its influence to the US. Its user numbers have grown exponentially since the website's inception. The company is also in partnership with Channel 4's "The Undateables".



All of these sites have a free basic membership as well as a paid subscription service, which provide additional features and benefits.



“I don’t have a preference in terms of dating people with a sight impairment or those who are sighted. It comes down to personality and whether they make me laugh. Saying that, I have found myself dating people who have been challenged in some way – perhaps it’s because we have something in common.”

**GEORGIE MORRELL,
@GEORGIEPOKEEYE**

GLIMMER

Glimmer is a social and relationship app, designed for people with disabilities but open to anyone. The app offers the option for you to disclose your disability, if you would like, in a bid to “promote transparency between users”, which it compares against apps like Tinder and Bumble.

The app is still relatively new, but it is one of the few specialist disabled dating websites on the app store.



Want more tricks, tips and tech for living with sight loss?

Visit henshaws.org.uk/knowledge-village for free resources including the rest of our eBook series, weekly blog, and short videos.

“WHEN SHOULD I MENTION MY VISUAL IMPAIRMENT?”

The right time to bring up your eye condition differs for everyone – do you mention it in your bio? Do you bring it up after talking for a while, or on the first date?



✓ Mentioning it in your profile may make you feel vulnerable and more susceptible to people who will try to exploit you. It can also make you feel like you’re defining yourself by your visual impairment.

✓ It may though help to weed out some of the bad eggs from the dating pool, and it may take some of the stress of bringing it up later, and feeling like you’ve not been completely honest with someone.

Ultimately there’s no right or wrong time; bring it up when it feels most comfortable for you.



“I updated my profile to include my disability. I am still receiving just as many winks and likes as I did before, but I am a lot more secure in the knowledge that people are taking an interest in me in spite of my disability.”

TIMOTHY SYKES, @TIMSYKES3

“Should we be telling guys flat-out that we are blind in our profiles? My stance is no, because then a lot scroll by immediately, thinking that I’m going to be a ‘burden.’ I like them get to know me first, but tell them before we go on our first date.”



TIFFANY JOLIFF, WASHINGTON POST

ADVICE FOR THE FIRST DATE



- 1 | Suggest places you know and have been before, so you feel comfortable at the venue and how to get there. It might help to arrive early to get a feel of the place.
- 2 | Make sure you let someone know where you are going. This is sound advice for anyone meeting people online!
- 3 | You might feel more comfortable bringing a friend who can support you to get there and let you know when your date has arrived, but then sit away so they aren't actively involved in your discussion.
- 4 | If you have mutual friends, you could suggest a double-date, which might help ease any initial awkwardness.
- 5 | If you're a guide dog user and bringing your dog, it's a good idea to double-check beforehand. If your date is allergic or dislikes dogs, it might not be a viable match.
- 6 | Avoid messy foods! A good tip for anyone; make sure you feel comfortable eating food that won't spill.

“The more comfortable you get with setting up a date, the easier it gets. I had a few standard locations, but you don't always want to be the one picking the location, and you should be open to new spots.”



JOE STRECHAY, VISION AWARE



“Be prepared to have a conversation about your visual impairment. Be positive and share how independent you are. I have found that when I confidently share this part of my life the guy seems more relaxed and at ease.”

TOP TIPS FOR SIGHTED PEOPLE

If you've never dated someone with a visual impairment before, you might have some questions, concerns or misconceptions. We've produced a guide that covers issues you might not have thought about, or felt too awkward to ask.

DATING WEBSITES



Although awareness is getting better, the misconception that blind and visually impaired people don't use social media, or worse, aren't interested in relationships, still exists.

You may find that people are surprised that you met someone who's visually impaired on a dating website – they just need a bit of educating and awareness (maybe share this eBook with them!)

CLASSIC DATES



Theatres, cinemas, museums, and even football games all have different accessibility options such as audio description or tactile elements, so don't write off classic dates. This information can usually be found online, or by asking a member of staff. A little bit of planning and consideration can really help with this.

Some restaurants offer braille menus or large print menus as well, or will have online versions that might work with a screenreader.



“Arrange to meet somewhere familiar to you. Menus can be accessed online beforehand, but I know if I did anything spontaneous that I’d make the menu reading into a little game of ‘what do you think I might like to try?’ to lighten it up a little!”

NATHAN

PLANNING



What time is the last train or bus? If you move to a different place, is it easy to find nearby transport or get a taxi from? Is the venue accessible? Spontaneity is fun, but it can really ease concerns if the date has some pre-planning.

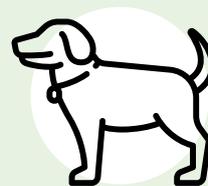
As driving isn’t an option for someone with a VI, it means that most people are left with planning public transport routes which, depending on the time of day, can be temperamental. It’s best to plan ahead in order to sort out any problematic logistics.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



It’s obvious if you are disinterested, not putting the effort in, not looking at your date whilst they’re speaking, or even uncomfortable - your date will be able to tell, with or without sight!

GUIDE DOGS



If your date has an assistance dog, make sure to ask before petting the dog, and don't try and feed them anything if you're somewhere that serves food.

Guide dogs are working dogs; as adorable as they are, it's essential that your date is able to put complete trust in their four-legged companion, so the dog needs to be able to focus entirely on their work.

OPEN COMMUNICATION



A large part of communication relies on non-verbal cues; body language, eye contact, hand gestures. Try to be open and up-front so your date doesn't have to do guesswork; for example, if you need to leave soon, just say rather than hint by repeatedly checking your watch.

If you're on a date with someone with a disability and they're open to talking about it, don't be afraid to ask questions. Trying to understand a condition you have not experienced personally is a difficult feat.

Remember to not let it dominate the conversation; there's more to people than their disability, and if you're on a date, there are probably many interests that you have in common that you can chat about instead.

“I am sure people think very different things when they first meet my husband and me. It is obvious I am blind so probably one of the first things they think is what a wonderful man he must be to marry a woman who is blind.

That is just not true. He is wonderful but not because he married a person who is blind.

People assume he must have to do everything for me. He gets automatic sainthood because it's assumed he must have to clean, do the laundry, and cook. He does some of these things but not because I can't!”



RHONDA, 'WELCOME TO OUR WORLD'

INDEPENDENCE



Always ask your partner whether they want help with something; never assume that they can't do things for themselves. No one wishes to feel unequal within a relationship, and rather than being helpful, it can strip away someone's independence and self-confidence.

Want more advice on communicating with VI people? Watch Kevin speak to Debbie about experiences he's encountered (good and bad!) and his advice.



COPING WITH SIGHT LOSS DURING A RELATIONSHIP

Receiving a sight loss diagnosis is difficult for anyone.

When someone is diagnosed with sight loss, they will no doubt be facing many emotional challenges. For the partner, it can be helpful to know about common responses to sight loss so you can better understand how to support your other half.



“I didn’t see a change in my partner through it all and he was brilliant. I guess I was more distant and emotional, but he just treated me as normal and that really helped as I couldn’t admit to myself that I couldn’t see.”

ANGIE

When someone loses their sight they may create distance. This may be because they don’t want to feel like a hindrance or dependent.

Alternatively, a sighted person may feel out of their depth and unsure of the best way to help their significant other. Trying to keep an open dialogue, and being as empathetic as possible, is key to the relationship.

“Just about everything gets thrown into the blender. It’s so uncomfortable, so difficult! But if you can stick it out, a deeper trust and understanding may develop. Your ability to communicate and understand others will be enhanced by your acquaintance with grief.”



HANNAH, VISION LOSS AND PERSONAL RECOVERY (VLPR)

Henshaws Counsellor Sian shares her advice on how you can best support your partner during a sight loss diagnosis, such as;

- ✓ Be there for your partner – pick up the phone, arrange a visit, let them know you are there and willing to support them.
- ✓ Many people diagnosed with a VI report feeling like a burden to family and friends. Talk to your loved one, let them know you want to support them, and be honest with them about what you feel you can and can't do.
- ✓ Understand that everyone will react to sight loss in their own way – there is no 'normal' way to react.



DOWNLOAD THE FULL TIPS FROM SIAN

Going through sight loss is difficult, but in the long-term it can help to create a deeper sense of trust in one another. It's important to realise that things will inevitably change, but that's okay.

Help is readily available for anyone going through sight loss, as well as their partner. For more advice and support, get in touch with Henshaws First Step team on 0300 222 5555.

“As my sight changes so does the dynamic of the relationship - but not necessarily in a negative way. I do require more help every now and then but that has made us closer. It also means that she can count on me to be there for her more as we work as a team to overcome each other's problems.”



NATHAN

CLOSING WORDS

Relationships and dating can be difficult for anyone, and everyone has different challenges, obstacles and experiences.

Chatting with and getting advice from others going through similar experiences can really help.

That's why Henshaws run social groups across Greater Manchester and Liverpool, where you can meet local people and try a range of different activities, including visiting museums and yoga.



FIND YOUR LOCAL HENSHAWS SOCIAL AND ACTIVITY GROUP ON OUR WEBSITE

There are also plenty of online forums and groups to chat with others going through similar experiences, including;

- **VI Talk on Facebook** - a national FB group for visually impaired members.
- **RNIB Connect** - regional (eg North West) and national groups available on the RNIB Connect Forum, for visually impaired members.
- **Scope Community Forum** - online, national community for all disabilities.

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“I think if I were going to give any advice it would be to be open and honest about your VI from the very beginning. Don't be ashamed of it, because the more you accept it in yourself, the more other people will too.”

Casey

“One time we were on a date at Starbucks. We had gotten our drinks and I needed to excuse myself to go to the toilets. I knew where the mens were, so I go off upstairs. A few minutes later my girlfriend gets a phone call asking for help. I have no idea what went through her head at that point.

What happened was there was a sign saying the toilets were out of order and locked. I had obviously missed this and assumed it was the wrong door, so I went through another one. I looked for a light switch but I couldn't find one - I had gone through a fire exit and couldn't get back! Needless to say she was very helpful and understanding and it was a great story to tell people.”

Nathan



Do you have your own story, experience or advice to share? We'd love to hear it!

Get in touch with the Henshaws marketing team at stories@henshaws.org.uk or give us a call on 0300 222 5555.

Many thanks to all of those who agreed to take part in this eBook, and special thanks to Adrijana, Angie, Casey, Marc and Nathan for sharing their stories.

STORIES SHARED FROM



- Ben and Rhonda - [Love Really Is Blind](#)
- Kathianne Boniello - [Match.com leaves the visually impaired in the dark](#)
- Molly Burke - videos from her [YouTube channel](#)
- Hannah Fairbairn - [Dealing with sight loss in your partner, parent or best friend \(Vision Loss and Personal Recovery\)](#)
- Layla Haidrani - [What it's like to date when you're blind](#)
- Alexandra E. Petri - [What's it like to date while blind?](#)
- Timothy Sykes - [Online dating is hard enough. Try doing it with a disability](#)
- Joe Strechay - [Dating When Blind or Visually Impaired \(Vision Aware\)](#)
- Empish J. Thomas - [Tips For Dating for People New to Visual Impairment \(Vision Aware\)](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James is a volunteer with the Henshaws marketing team, and a recent graduate from York St John University. He enjoys sci-fi and fantasy such as Star Wars and Game of Thrones, as well as sports and travelling. He has Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP).

