

henshaws

beyond expectations

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- **organising and adapting your home for your visually impaired child**

When your child is visually impaired, you may need to think about how you can organise or adapt things in your home to help your child learn skills and become more independent. There are a number of elements to bear in mind and some are easier to implement than others. As with any advice, you will need to consider how much useful vision your child has, how significantly things like 'light' affect them and also your budget. Some of the things you might want to consider are:

- **Lighting, colour, contrast and clutter**
- **Texture, touch and other senses**
- **Labels and marking**
- **Safety**



● **lighting**

If your child has some useful vision, try to find out what kind of light suits them best. For some children it will be natural light through a window, for others it may be dim conditions. Consider how this affects your home. For example, is there plenty of light in the room that your child uses most? Is it too bright? Would fitting blinds help to reduce the brightness on a sunny day? Using additional lighting from a lamp with an adjustable arm might help if the area where your child plays is a little dark.

● **glare**

Glare caused by light reflecting off shiny surfaces can be uncomfortable for a lot of children with a visual impairment. You can try different things to try and eliminate this. If possible, experiment with the positioning of your TV or table to reduce glare. Will blinds help? Buy a lamp that can be adjusted to minimise glare. Simple techniques like placing mats or a tablecloth on the table can reduce the glare at mealtimes or when the child is doing homework.



● colour

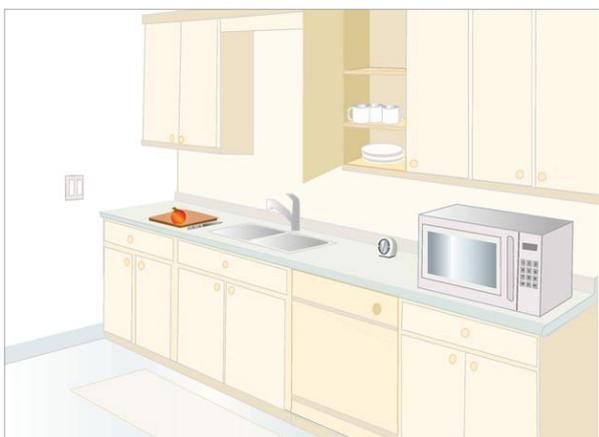
Some children with a visual impairment will have a preference for certain colours. If this is the case for your child, you can use that colour for drawing attention to their belongings – toothbrushes, cups, toy boxes etc.

● contrast

Contrast in the different rooms of your home is key when thinking about how you can make life easier for your child. Putting brightly coloured toys on a plain white sheet will make it easier for them to see the toys. A coloured soap dish on the bathroom sink will be much easier to locate than a white one. Think about contrast with cupboards and drawers if this is possible. The illustrations below (courtesy of VisionAware) highlight the difference contrast can make in your home.



Bathroom sink areas with and without contrast.



High and low contrast in the kitchen.

Using a coloured place mat to place your child's plate on will create contrast, as will choosing a plate that will highlight the food on it. For example, using a white bowl for dark coloured cereal.

● clutter

We would all love a clutter-free home but when you have a visually impaired child it becomes a must. When objects on a shelf or a tabletop are clustered together, it makes it very hard for someone with low vision to make out the individual items thus impossible to pick out what they need. Avoid letting clutter build up on surfaces and consider leaving spaces between items on shelves or in cupboards to make things easier to see.

● texture, touch and other senses

Encouraging your child to use their other senses to gain information about where things are in your home is important whatever the level of their vision. Simple things like rubber bands can be placed around their toothbrush so they know which is theirs without having to ask. In the shower you could place one rubber band around the shampoo and two around the shower gel so they are easily distinguishable. Tactile labels or bumpons can be used in the kitchen to allow your child to find things independently. You could use magnetic letters to highlight the fridge and bumpons for the crockery cupboard. If your child is a braille reader you could use braille labels or large print labels if your child has some useful vision. Hanging wind chimes in the hall for example, will highlight to your child where in the house they are. Using strong scented pot pourri in one room may also be useful. If your budget allows it may be worth investing in different textured wallpaper for the different rooms in your house, and/or contrasting floor coverings.

Most children with a visual impairment will become familiar with the layout of their own homes. They may use or be learning to use a cane but will prefer to move around the house by 'trailing'. This is when a person with a visual impairment uses their hand on the wall, slightly in front of them to warn of any obstacles that they may bump into. If your child moves around in this way it is important to keep walkways and floors clear. Consider the height of any hanging mirrors or pictures. Is your child going to knock them as they move around?

Think about additional tactile/sensory clues that you could add to your home. For example, placing a securely taped thin rubber mat under your child's toy box will help them to find it independently.

• safety

There are safety considerations to think about for your home; in brief you could consider:

- Taping down the edges of rugs or removing them completely as they can be a trip hazard.
- Keeping room and cabinet doors closed to prevent your child from bumping into them. If you need to leave room doors open, prop them securely all the way.
- Remind all family members about the importance of putting their things away. Leaving shoes, bags, toys lying around on the floor will cause your child to fall.
- Using safety locks on all cupboards, particularly those containing cleaning products or medicines



For more ideas on how to effectively organise and adapt your home to promote independence visit:

<https://visionaware.org/everyday-living/home-modification-/>

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