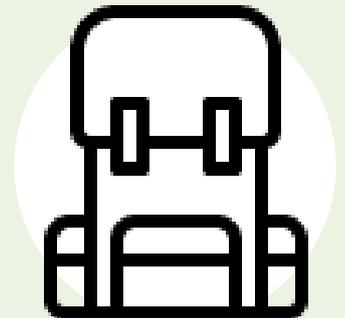


• **henshaws**

beyond expectations

August 2020



• **encouraging independence in your child with vision impairment**

It can be tempting for many parents to do things for their child as it is faster or easier, but it is particularly important to help blind and partially sighted children to develop these skills for themselves, rather than intervening. A good balance of support and encouraging your child to do things for themselves is essential for developing these vital life skills.

• getting dressed

- Start with undressing - it is easier to take things off than it is to put them on!
- Teach your child to put their clothes away properly – good organisational skills are essential for blind and partially sighted people so that they keep track of where belongings are. They will need to be taught how - it won't just happen!
- Choose clothing that is easy to put on and take off. If you find a style that works well for your child, try to find this style in other clothes.
- Find clothes with zips instead of buttons where possible and opt for large buttons rather than small, fiddly ones. This will make learning to fasten clothes much easier.
- Choose clothing, where possible, which has obvious fronts and backs so that your child can easily identify which way round clothes go.
- Use consistent language and routines for dressing, such as always putting underwear on first etc. This will allow your child to learn the routine for themselves.
- Initially, model and describe what you are doing while guiding from behind. Gradually reduce the amount of guidance and support and allow your child to do it for themselves.
- Teach your child about appropriate clothing, e.g. for cold weather choose long sleeves, in summer choose shorts and lighter clothing.

Top Tip

Habilitation Officers are qualified to help children with vision impairments to learn vital life skills. Speak to your local sensory education team or Guide Dogs for more information.



● shoes

Learning to tie shoes may seem a bit daunting for a blind or visually impaired child but learning independence and age-appropriate motor skills is very important for their development.

- Begin practicing with your child between the ages of five and seven, which is when most children learn this skill.
- Practice consistently and teach them the process in stages. There are also some more creative approaches you can try, such as using laces of various sizes and textures or trying a resource like a shoelace “book.”
- Start off slowly with the child, since learning this skill won’t happen overnight. You don’t have to start until you feel they’re ready. Try to do it at a time when your child does not feel rushed, perhaps during holidays when you don’t have to rush out of the door on the school run!
- Until they learn to tie their own laces, keep the child in Velcro-fastened shoes.
- Keep the method consistent. If more than one person is teaching your child to tie laces, make sure that they follow the same method.
- Begin by holding the child’s hands from behind and model what to do. Describe what you are doing at each stage.
- It takes all children – whether sighted or otherwise – a while to get the hang of tying their shoelaces, so take your time!



● brushing teeth

For a child who is blind or visually impaired, learning to brush teeth can present some challenges, however it is important for personal hygiene. Follow these tips to make tooth brushing a little easier.

- Selecting a brightly coloured toothbrush will help make selecting the correct toothbrush easier. Store the toothbrush in the same place, preferably separate from other people’s so that it is easy to identify their own toothbrush.
- You might even consider buying an electric toothbrush: many flash, or light up or stop once recommended brushing times are completed. Make brushing fun!
- It might help to place the brush on top of a contrasting cloth. Apply the toothpaste on to the brush whilst on the contrasting colour. This makes the brush easier to see since the bristles are white. You may wish to encourage your child to apply the toothpaste directly on to their finger to avoid having to find the bristles.

● food preparation and mealtimes

The kitchen can seem like a dangerous space for visually impaired children and, often, parents may discourage their visually impaired child from spending time there. However, learning skills in the area of food preparation will help the students to contribute within the home and it is also a great way to learn responsibility! Sorting, matching, reading labels, measuring, and many other skills can be naturally embedded in these experiences. Children should be taught from an early age to be involved in the food preparation process. The visually impaired child, more than others, needs to enjoy and learn from the kitchen smells, kitchen textures, kitchen sounds, and kitchen tasks.

Teach your child these useful skills and tips to help them become independent later in life. Make sure skills are age-appropriate and supervised where necessary.

- How to safely operate various household appliances (can opener, sewing machine, kettle if age appropriate).
- How to set a table: Put the knife on the right-hand side and the fork on the left, for example.
- Although it may be easier and possibly neater to feed the child or to provide extra assistance, it is not appropriate when the child has the ability to feed themselves.
- It is essential to promote mealtime independence, not only to build independence but to promote social acceptance as well.
- Place the food on a table or tray in front of your child. At first, assist them by using verbal cues and hand-under-hand assistance to help them locate and pick up the food.
- Provide finger foods: pieces of cracker, ice cream cone, spaghetti to promote finger sensitivity. Peel eggs, fruit, and wrapping on some containers to develop skilful hands.
- Use high contrast utensils and dishes for children with low vision.
- Bowls and plates with suction cups can help them stay in place.
- Let your child know where food is on the plate. For older children, use clock time, e.g. carrots are at 6 o'clock, chips are at 9 o'clock and chicken is at 3 o'clock.
- Consider asking your child to help you serve out the food themselves, particularly for older children so that it doesn't just 'appear' on their plate.

● skills to learn for food preparation

It is important to help children learn how to prepare their own food. Some tips below will help you safely teach the necessary skills and consider useful ways to build up these skills.

● pouring

There are several methods that can be used to determine if a glass or container is at the right level:

- Place a finger over the edge of a glass to detect the level of the liquid as it reaches the finger. This doesn't work for hot beverages!
- Hold the glass/cup as it is filled and determine the level of the liquid by weight.
- Pay attention to the temperature change on the outside of the glass/cup as it is filled.
- Use an object that floats above the liquid (e.g. ice cube) to detect when the liquid nears the top of the glass.
- Use a liquid level indicator.

Top tip

Teach children to pour liquids over a sink or tray.



● cutting, dicing and peeling

- Use a knife with an adjustable guide. Instruct the student to keep the fingers of the hand that is not holding the knife resting slightly curled on the item to be cut. To teach a student to peel, teach the student how to use a paring knife or vegetable peeler. Frequently rinsing the food being peeled can help the student identify areas that still need to be peeled.

• measuring

- If the student has useable vision, use colour contrast and good lighting along with high contrast markings on measuring tools.
- It is helpful to use measuring cups so that exact measurements are not needed.
- For tactile learners, label measuring cups and spoons with braille and/or tactile markings or place notches on the handle. Demonstrate how to measure ingredients over a larger container to catch spills.



Top tip

Enquire about Henshaws 'I Can Do It' course which is all about learning life skills.

• other skills

When spreading semi-soft solids, such as butter, teach the child to spread outward from the centre and go in a systematic pattern: left to right and top to bottom.

- Cooking and baking are great ways of learning about food and different textures.
- Give children age appropriate jobs, such as setting the table to eat, pouring cold drinks, slicing soft fruit, such as bananas. Allow children to help with weighing and measuring.

Top tip

Watch a variety of videos on Henshaws YouTube channel teaching a whole range of life skills!

www.youtube.com/user/Henshaws1837



Henshaws: 4a Washbrook House, Lancastrian Office Centre,
Talbot Road, Stretford, Manchester M32 0FP.

Contact us on: 0300 222 5555 or email: info@henshaws.org.uk

Registered charity number: 221888