

VIEW Conference 2025 – Family Engagement Presentation



Family Engagement – working with the whole family to support children and young people with vision impairment

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Session Aims

- To inform about the support available to families.
- To elaborate on the importance of family support when supporting young people with vision impairment.

What is Family Support / Family Engagement?

“Family Support is both a style of work and a set of activities that reinforce positive informal social networks through integrated programmes. These programmes contain statutory, voluntary, community and private services and are generally provided to families within their own homes and communities. The primary focus of these services is on early intervention, aiming to promote and protect health, wellbeing and rights of all children, young people and their families. At the same time, particular attention is given to those who are vulnerable or at risk.”

Understanding Family Support; Policy Practice and Theory, Canavan, Pinkerton, Dolan, 2016, p.20

What is Parenting Support?

“Parenting Support is a set of (service and other activities) orientated to improving how parents’ approach and execute their role as parents and to increasing parents’ child rearing resources (including information, knowledge, skills and social support) and competencies”

Family and Parenting Support, Day et al, UNICEF 2015

What do parents/families need at time of diagnosis of child's vision impairment?

- Information – timely, clear, written.
- Emotional support - a 'listening ear'.
- Practical support and guidance.

Parents want to know about:

- their child's sight condition.
- certification and registration.
- how to parent their child, interacting, play activities.
- financial benefits.
- education provision – their child's journey through nursery, school, college and beyond.
- key professionals and support services available.
- social and leisure opportunities.

What do children with vision impairment need?

Early Years

Babies and young children with VI can be at risk of poor developmental outcomes

Vision impairment presents challenges to learning:

- Social communication.
- Incidental learning.
- Concept development.
- Understanding the environment.
- Communication skills.
- Access to information.

Family support services may organise courses such as Parent Pathways from RNIB, Healthy Parent Carers from LOOK, Parents and tots' groups such as Guide Dogs' "My Time to Play" to support babies and young children with vision impairment in the Early Years

What do young people with VI need?

- Independent living skills.
- Mobility skills.
- Communication methods - braille, magnifiers, assistive technology.
- Social skills.
- Emotional health and wellbeing.
- Understanding their sight condition.

Family Support Officers can be a central contact point for families, linking them with the specialist professionals such as QTVIs and Habilitation Specialists

LOOK UK's Mentoring Scheme provides essential peer support for young people with VI, reducing their sense of isolation and giving them confidence that they can achieve their goals.

Examples and Case Studies

- LOOK's Parent Support Group, Healthy Parent Carer Course and other parent specific support (case studies).
- RNIB Projects supporting families in Northern Ireland from parent and tots' groups in partnership with other local and national VI organisations, children and young people's events and parent workshops with key specialists e.g. QTVIs, Habilitation Specialists and Clinicians (case study).

Examples of Support – LOOK UK

- LOOK and the Mentor Project - this is often a catalyst for the other support that we offer
- Parent Support Group - meeting every month via Zoom
- LOOK's Healthy Parent Carer Course – a transformational course, facilitated by parent carers of visually impaired young people.
- Video from Jo (LOOK's Project Assistant) talking about services for parents and families –
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14KPEc490HPGxo1p3TSxqSSZCHMNVCuP4?usp=sharing>
- Parent's view – hearing from some parents that have accessed LOOK's family support offerings as well as their children accessing the Mentor Project

Case Study – Early Years

- Baby born with anophthalmia and referred to the hospital Eye Care Liaison Officer aged 2 months
- ECLO referred to RNIB's Family Support Project in Northern Ireland and to QTVI Service and Health and Social Care Trust Sensory Support
- Family Support Officer spoke to the family on the phone to provide emotional support and information, advice and guidance. Met the family face to face at a local early years event when the baby was 8 weeks old and explained the service RNIB provides, as well as making follow up referrals to partner organisations
- Referred family to Guide Dogs who provided Habilitation
- Peer support with early linking in with other families via the RNIB Family Support Project and local charity Angel Eyes NI
- Continued engagement with parents' evenings, parent and tots and family support events

Barriers to Accessing Support

- Acceptance for the whole family - emotional aspects of acceptance.
- Grieving process for parents - acknowledging the trauma that diagnosis can bring.
- Other barriers and possible solutions.

The Importance of Connecting

- QTVIs connecting with families
- Families connecting with VI organisations
- VI organisations connecting with other VI organisations

Revisiting Our Aims

- To inform about the support available to families.
- To elaborate on the importance of family support when supporting young people with vision impairment.
- Any questions?

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