# Early years intervention and support for babies and young children with vision impairment

**January 2023**

This statement should be read alongside RNIB’s other [policy position statements on children and young people](https://www.rnib.org.uk/campaigning-policy-and-reports-hub-education/education-policy-statements)

This statement should be read in the context of the Equality Act 2010, the Children and Families Act 2014, and the 2014 statutory guidance, ‘[SEND Code of Practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25): 0 to 25 years’.

This statement is supported by [VIEW](http://www.viewweb.org.uk), the professional association of the vision impairment workforce.

## What we think

Vision impairment can significantly affect a child’s early development and later life chances. Outcomes in the early years (from birth to age two) can determine likely outcomes across a life-course. It is therefore essential that children with vision impairment receive timely, high quality, and specialist support in the early years.

Children with severe vision impairment are at particular risk of ‘developmental setback’ in the early years – the plateauing, or loss of, cognitive, language and social skills.

## What’s the issue

RNIB is concerned that many children with vision impairment may not be getting the support that they need in the early years. Key issues include:

* Referral pathways from health services to education and social care can be convoluted, meaning that children face delays in receiving early years support from specialists.
* Qualified teachers of children and young people with vision impairments (QTVIs) and qualified habilitation specialists (QHS) are often not adequately involved in the planning of a child’s provision, meaning that the opportunity to coordinate holistic support and services at the point of diagnosis – spanning health, education and social care – is missed.

Babies and young children with VI may not have access to a structured, home-based programme of intervention with regular visits and input from QTVIs and QHS to support their development. This has been compounded by the coronavirus pandemic, with many ‘visiting’ or professionals working in a peripatetic role (such as QTVIs and QHS) replacing face-to-face support with remote support to children with vision impairment and their families. Whilst support can sometimes be provided remotely, this will not always be the most effective way of meeting the family’s needs. For instance, demonstrating or modelling good practice can only be delivered in person.

* Pandemic’s impact?
* Parents’ direct access to advice and information from specialist professionals decreases when their child enters nursery or school, as home-based support is withdrawn and replaced by support in the education setting.

## Recommendations

* Children should be assessed by specialist health, education and habilitation professionals at the point of diagnosis, and at regular intervals, and a plan agreed and implemented in a timely manner, then regularly reviewed throughout the early years.
* A structured early intervention programme should be in place for each child with severe vision impairment which is tailored to their individual needs and delivered by specialist, trained professionals. Recent research shows that use of the [Developmental Journal for babies and young children with visual impairment](https://xip.uclb.com/i/healthcare_tools/DJVI_professional.html) secures the best outcomes regarding child development, behaviour and parental wellbeing [1].
* Services and professionals should place particular focus on restoring face-to-face support, as much as possible, where this is likely to benefit the child and family and consider the risks to a child’s development if support is not provided face-to-face in any risk assessments on whether to conduct face-to-face visits. In some cases, there may be no alternative but to provide support remotely for a short period (for example, because of a lockdown or if someone in the household has coronavirus symptoms). Professionals should ensure that support can still be provided remotely, as much as possible.
* Parents should have access to regular support and guidance about supporting their child’s early development from QTVIs and QHS.
* The high needs funding block for local authorities must be sufficient and protected to ensure that high quality early years services can be provided by QTVIs and QHS in recognition of the importance of early intervention for children with vision impairment and the impact that it can have on later life outcomes. [move higher up]

## What RNIB is doing

RNIB continues to work with partner organisations to campaign for better support for children and young people and young people with vision impairment, so they can reach their full potential in adult life. Many of our policy priorities are reflected in the [VI curriculum project](https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/education-professionals/development-new-uk-specialist-vi-curriculum-framework) which seeks to define, unify and embed best practice support for children and young people with VI.

## Contact

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