

Healthy Eyes

Helping adults with learning disabilities
to recognise signs of sight loss



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This training pack aims to give you, the trainer, step-by-step guidance on how to help adults with learning disabilities to recognise signs of sight loss. The pack will also help your training participants to have more confidence in attending an eye test.

If someone has sight loss as well as a learning disability, their quality of life may worsen, and they may have fewer opportunities to enjoy or take part in everyday activities. It may also put someone at a higher risk of self-harm, loss of skills or isolation.

Sight loss is often hidden or not recognised among people with learning disabilities. People with learning disabilities tend to have greater difficulty communicating any issues around sight loss. Therefore, it is vital that as many people as possible know how to recognise the signs of sight loss in people with learning disabilities. This training pack aims to help you discuss how to do this with your training participants.

How to use this pack

This pack consists of this training guide, video clips and a set of 12 picture cards which you should print before you deliver the first training session. Take the time to read through this guide to familiarise yourself with its contents and key messages. You should also view the films as you go along.



When you see this symbol, play the named video file.

This training is suitable for a group consisting of 5-8 participants. A training session for a group this size will take approximately two hours (breaks are recommended throughout the session). It is possible to use this training with a larger or smaller group, but you need to vary the length of the session.

General tips

- Follow the steps one by one.
- Use the notes in each section to guide discussions, or to help bring up points that the participants have not raised already.
- Encourage discussion between the participants and invite stories or experiences that are relevant to the key messages.
- Don't give the participants the answers too quickly. Allow them time to think and discuss among themselves first.
- Get the participants to recap the key messages from each section to help them to be remembered.
- Bear in mind that people with a learning disability need time to process a question; some people can even need as much time as a count of ten. Allow this time before filling in silences.
- You may need to have some communication facilitation tools (such as happy and sad face cards) with you to help those with communication difficulties.
- Remember that this resource aims to empower people with a learning disability and encourage them to think creatively and independently.

Part One – What is healthy for our eyes?

Explain to participants we are going to start by thinking about what is good, or bad, for your eyes and vision.

Group ice-breaker activity with picture cards

Print the picture cards included in the pack before the training session starts.

1. Start by pulling out the two cards which show the green tick symbol and the red X. Place one card in one area of the room, and the other card in a different area.
2. Give each participant a picture card from the pack, face down, and tell them not to turn it over until you say so. Give all the cards out. (Depending on group size, each person may have more than one card.)
3. Explain that some cards show pictures of things that are good for the health of the eyes, and others have pictures of things that are bad for the eyes.
4. Ask the participants to turn over their cards, and decide whether their pictures are good or bad.
5. Ask the participants to place their picture beside the green tick card if they think it is good, and beside the red X if they think it is bad for the eyes.
6. Ask the participants for their reasons for placing the card where they did, and then ask what people's thoughts are on whether they agree and why.
7. See notes on each card below to confirm reasons given or otherwise.



Use the information below to explain the picture cards in the green tick category:



Sunglasses

Wearing sunglasses can help to protect your eyes from the damaging effect of UV rays in bright sunlight.



Fruit and vegetables

Eating a wide variety of fruit and vegetables will help to keep your eyes healthy.



Eye drops

There are many reasons for using eye drops. If they have been prescribed or recommended by your GP or optician, then you should use them. Some people may be recommended to use eye drops to keep the eye lubricated and reduce infection or inflammation.

It may not always be advisable to use eye drops if they have not been recommended by your GP or optician.



Use the information below to explain the picture cards in the green tick category:



Regular eye tests

Everyone is recommended to go for an eye test at least every two years. You should go more often than every two years if you are under 16 or if you're advised to by your optician. In Scotland, it is recommended that you go for an eye test every year if you're 60 or over. In the rest of the UK if you are 70 or over you should go every year. Always follow the advice of your optician regarding how often you should attend your eye test.

Regular eye tests help to ensure your eyes are healthy and can pick up any early signs of eye conditions. An eye test can also help pick up signs of other health conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure.

Regular eye tests will check how well you are seeing and if you need glasses to help you make the most of your vision.



Wearing prescribed glasses

Prescribed glasses are tailor-made for your eyes. They will help your vision to be the best it can be. Wearing your prescribed glasses can help reduce headaches and eye strain.

Sharing your glasses with your friends

This is not recommended, as your glasses will not be made for your friend's exact needs. Also, glasses can be mixed up and you could end up with the wrong pair that isn't yours.



Use the information below to explain the picture cards in the red X category:



Smoking

Chemicals in cigarettes are harmful to your eyes and your eyesight.



Rubbing your eyes

Avoid rubbing your eyes because you could accidentally poke, scratch or infect them.



Use the information below to explain the cards that are neither good nor bad:



Sitting too close to the TV

An optician will tell you that you should sit as close or far from the TV as is comfortable for you. Watching TV at an uncomfortable distance for you, whether it is too near or too far, may lead to headaches and eye strain.



Reading in low light

Reading in dim light will not actually hurt your eyes, but may be harder and therefore may cause eye strain and headaches.

Part Two – What are the signs of sight loss?

In this next section, we are going to look at what behaviours people may demonstrate if they are having difficulty seeing.

A person may not always notice when their sight gets worse, and sometimes other people don't notice either.

If a person has noticed that things are getting harder to see, and is able to tell people, then they may be able to ask for help.

But if a person cannot easily explain what they are experiencing, then they may have the dual problem of their eyesight getting worse, and not being able to tell someone they need help.

There are times when a person will rely on family, friends or support staff to notice that they are having difficulty seeing.

Ask the participants these questions

Question 1

How do you know you're able to see?

Question 2

What things might you have problems doing if you can't see well?

You can encourage discussion by prompting the participants with these further questions:

- How would you get around if you can't see well?
- How easy would it be to watch TV or look at magazines?
- How easy would it be to talk or socialise with friends?

Question 3

What behaviours or difficulties might you notice in someone else who isn't seeing well?

You can encourage discussion by prompting the participants with these further questions:

- Would this person who isn't seeing well be happy when out and about?
- Would they be good at moving around or picking things up?
- Would they enjoy joining in activities?

Scene 1 – Breakfast

Explain to the participants that they are now going to watch six short scenes, featuring a woman called Jenna. Jenna has learning disabilities and is a wheelchair user. She lives at home, and is helped by a team of support workers.

After each scene, you will ask questions about what the participants have seen and what they think is happening.

Allow time for answers after each question, follow the natural discussions of the group, and use prompts after each question to help direct discussion if necessary.



Discussion points

1. What did you see happening in the film?

You would like the participants to notice that Jenna has:

- nearly spilled tea over the support worker
- been searching for the teacup with her hand rather than reaching straight out for it
- left a sausage on her plate unintentionally.

2. Could there be another reason for Jenna's behaviour?

You would like the participants to consider whether Jenna:

- is being lazy, dreamy, clumsy or careless
- has not seen the cup or the sausage, and that is the reason for her behaviour.

Prompt the participants towards this thinking, if need be.

3. Why do you think the support worker hasn't noticed that Jenna is having difficulty seeing?

Here are some reasons for the participants to consider, if they haven't come up with them already:

- He assumes Jenna will tell him if she can't see.
- He's annoyed at her behaviour, which he thinks is clumsy.
- Jenna's sight has been getting worse very gradually rather than all of a sudden, so it's hard for him to connect Jenna's behaviour to sight loss.
- He is busy and in a rush, so doesn't take the time to think about why Jenna is behaving the way she is.

Scene 2 – Going out

Explain to participants we are now going to see where Jenna is off to next...



Play Scene 2



Discussion points

1. What might be stopping Jenna from wheeling her chair herself?

If there are no immediate responses, you can prompt by asking:

- Do you think Jenna is being lazy?
- Do you think Jenna feels like she CAN physically wheel herself?
- Do you think Jenna is scared to wheel herself?

Encourage the participants to get to the understanding that Jenna does not feel like she is confident enough to wheel herself, because she cannot see well enough now.

2. What do you think Jenna is scared of happening if she wheels herself?

Propose examples of what Jenna might be scared about:

- She might bump into things and hurt herself.
- She may bump into other people and hurt them.
- She may fall off kerbs.

3. How will Jenna's confidence be affected if she can't see where she is going?

Encourage the participants to realise after discussion that:

- Jenna's confidence is likely to decrease due to not seeing well.
- She won't want to be independent and do things alone, which is likely to further affect her confidence.
- If Jenna's confidence decreases, this could impact on her confidence with carrying out tasks at home and when she goes out.

Scene 3 – Going to the social club

Explain to participants that Jenna is now going out with her friend Allie to their social club. Let's see what happens.



Play Scene 3



Discussion points

1. What happened in this scene?

You would like the participants to notice that:

- Jenna did not notice that her friend, Allie, was waving her over to meet a new person.
- Another person has got the impression that Jenna is rude.
- Jenna is alone in the club, sitting without any friends.

2. What is Jenna missing out on?

You would like the participants to consider that Jenna may be missing out on:

- meeting a new friend, and all the good things that can come from that
- hanging out with her friend Allie, who is now annoyed with her.

3. How do you think Jenna feels after she realises what has happened?

You would like the participants to consider that Jenna might be feeling:

- sad
- embarrassed
- scared
- a mixture of the above.

4. How do you think her friend Allie feels?

You would like the participants to consider that Allie might be:

- feeling annoyed with Jenna
- thinking that Jenna is being rude.

Scene 3 – Going to the social club

5. Why do you think her friend Allie might feel like this rather than noticing her friend is having problems with her sight?

You would like the participants to consider that because Allie doesn't understand the signs of sight loss, she thinks Jenna's behaviour is due to other reasons.

6. How are Jenna's sight problems affecting her life?

Encourage the participants to realise after discussion that:

- People around Jenna are beginning to get annoyed with her because they do not understand the signs of sight loss, and Jenna has not told them about her vision getting worse.
- Jenna is starting to become less independent.
- Jenna is missing out on opportunities.

7. Is Jenna herself aware that she's not seeing so well? If "yes", why doesn't she say so?

Encourage the group to think about whether Jenna might be:

- scared
- embarrassed
- in denial of her situation.

8. If Jenna isn't aware she has sight problems, why might this be the case?

Encourage the group to think about whether:

- Changes to Jenna's vision have happened so slowly that she hasn't really realised there is a big problem.
- Jenna knows that she is struggling to do things, but doesn't realise it has to do with her sight becoming worse.
- Jenna just thinks she is becoming a bit clumsy.

Scene 4 – Jenna at the cafe

Explain to the participants that Jenna's friend Allie has said she will go for a coffee with her. Maybe Allie can start to find out what is going on with Jenna.



Play Scene 4



Discussion points

1. What happened in this scene?

If the participants have not realised yet, help them to understand that:

- Jenna has not been able to read the menu
- she got a fright when the waitress approached, so she jumped, nearly knocking the cups which the waitress was holding.

2. How's Jenna feeling?

As in the scene before, you would like the participants to consider that Jenna might be feeling:

- sad
- embarrassed
- scared
- confused
- a mixture of the above.

3. How's her friend Allie feeling?

Encourage the participants to recognise that Allie is still annoyed with Jenna and hasn't seemed to realise that her friend needs help.

4. Should Allie have noticed that something is up?

Encourage the participants to recognise that ideally, Allie should have noticed, but unfortunately she doesn't seem to realise there is a problem, she just thinks Jenna is being difficult.

Scene 4 – Jenna at the cafe

5. Why do you think Jenna can't tell Allie about her problems?

Encourage the participants to consider that Jenna might be:

- finding it difficult to admit to herself that she is struggling
- scared to think about life without her vision
- embarrassed or just in denial.

6. Is there anything Allie could do to help?

You would like the participants to understand that:

- If Allie could stop and think about the difficulties Jenna has been having, she may realise that Jenna is having problems with her sight.
- problems, and suggest she gets professional help (for example, speaking to an optician, GP, senior support staff or nurse).
- Allie should be more understanding about Jenna's difficulties and try and find out why Jenna is struggling.

Scene 5 – Jenna at home: the phone call

Explain to participants that Jenna is now at home and her friend Carl tries to call her.



Play Scene 5



Discussion points

1. What happened in this scene?

If the participants have not realised yet, help them to understand that:

- Jenna missed the first call as she could not find her phone.
- Jenna said she didn't feel like going out.
- She tried to get her friends to come to the house instead of going out.

2. How did Carl feel when Jenna said she didn't want to come out?

If the participants have not realised yet, help them to understand that:

- Carl felt that Jenna was not interested in coming out with him anymore.
- He may have felt a bit hurt or rejected by that.
- He responded in an annoyed manner to Jenna.

3. Why do you think Jenna said "no" to going out?

Encourage the participants to consider that:

- Jenna wouldn't be able to see the cinema screen properly.
- She doesn't like going out because she struggles to see things.
- She finds it harder being out in the dark.
- The cinema is dark as well, so she might find it hard to get to her seat space.

4. How do you think Jenna will feel if Carl does not phone her again?

Encourage the participants to consider that:

- Jenna will be losing another friend.
- This would make her feel sad, hurt and maybe scared that she will end up alone.

Scene 5 – Jenna at home: the phone call

Explain to participants you are now going to play a video clip of Carl and Jenna answering some questions which are being asked by an interviewer. The clip will help to explain what is happening between Jenna and Carl.



**Play Interview
Scene 1 –
Carl and Jenna**



Scene 6 – Jenna and Stephanie

Ask participants if they think someone will finally notice that Jenna needs help. Explain to participants we are now going to watch the last scene of Jenna's day where Stephanie, a support worker, comes to talk to her.



Play Scene 6



Discussion points

1. What happened this time?

If the participants have not realised yet, help them to understand that:

- Jenna wants to sit alone in the front room, without looking at a magazine, watching TV or sitting out in the sun.
- Stephanie almost left without exploring Jenna's different behaviours, but then stopped and went back to speak to Jenna again.

2. Did talking with Stephanie produce a good result for Jenna?

You would like the participants to answer "yes", because finally someone has realised Jenna is struggling and will try to talk to her about this.

3. Do you think Jenna will be able to open up to Stephanie?

Ask the participants for their opinions. You would like them to think that if Stephanie is kind and considerate about how she talks with Jenna, then Jenna will open up.

4. What do you think will be the best outcome after Jenna opens up to Stephanie?

Encourage the participants to recognise that ideally, Jenna should agree to get some professional help to investigate her sight loss and find out what can help.

Scene 6 – Jenna and Stephanie

Explain to participants you are now going to play a video clip of Jenna and Stephanie (the support worker) answering some questions which are being asked by an interviewer. This will help to explain what is happening between Jenna and Stephanie.



**Play Interview
Scene 2 –
Stephanie
and Jenna**



How Jenna's story ended

Participants may want to know that Jenna's story had a good ending.

Jenna's support worker realised that Jenna needed an eye test and booked one for her. As Jenna does not like going to new places, her support worker arranged a visit for them both to the optician's a few days before her eye test. During this visit, Jenna had the opportunity to meet the staff at reception and the optician who would be examining her. The optician showed her the examination room and explained how she carried out eye tests.

This gave Jenna a lot of reassurance. When Jenna, in the company of her support worker, went back for her eye test, she was comfortable with the process.

The optician checked the health of Jenna's eyes and her vision. It turned out that Jenna's vision had worsened since her last test. The optician advised that she needed new glasses and for Jenna to wear those glasses full time.

After Jenna picked up her new glasses and put them on, she could see much better.

Jenna now wears her glasses all the time, and can see clearly when doing activities and meeting people. She also goes for regular eye tests to make sure her eyes stay healthy.

Now ask the participants the following questions:

1. What would you do if you noticed you were not seeing as well as you used to?

Help participants to understand that if they notice they are having a problem with their eyes, or are not seeing as well as they used to, they should speak to someone who they trust as a first step. This may be a family member, friend, support worker, nurse or doctor.

In general, if anyone is having a problem with their eyes or are not seeing so well, that they should book an eye test with an optician or ask someone to help book an eye test for them.

2. What would you do if you noticed signs that possibly your friend or a member of your family was not seeing as well as they used to?

Explain to participants that they may:

- Ask their friend or family member if they can see OK.
- Advise their friend or family member that they should book and attend an eye test with an optician to have their eyes checked.
- Advise their friend or family member that it is important to attend routine eye tests and follow the advice given by the optician.

Key messages: Keeping your eyes healthy

Ask the participants about what key messages they can recall on keeping their eyes healthy and listen to their responses.

The key messages to remind them of are:

- Regular eye tests are important to get the best from your eyesight and maintain your eye health.
- Eating well and wearing your glasses are good for your eye health.
- Smoking and bright sunlight can be harmful to your eyes.
- People with learning disabilities are more likely to have sight difficulties.
- You may not notice slow changes to your vision.
- If you know you're having difficulties, ask for help!

Key messages: Signs of sight loss

Ask the participants about the key messages they can recall on signs that someone may be having difficulty seeing.

The key messages to remind them of are:

Someone who is finding it difficult to see might show behaviours such as:

- being clumsy
- being less involved in activities
- avoiding going out, especially in the dark
- mobility difficulties, increased trips or falls.

If you notice these behaviours in yourself or others, an appointment with an optician should be arranged.

Part Three – Visiting an optician

Explain to participants that we will explore why you should visit an optician, what to expect and some of the things that you can do to help make the visit comfortable and improve the outcome.

Introductory questions

Ask the participants the following:

1. Can anyone tell me what an optician does?

Answer: An optician will examine your eyes. He or she will check to see if you have any eye condition, how well you can see and prescribe glasses if you need them. An optician is also known as an optometrist.

2. Raise your hands if you've been to see an optician before.

3. How did it make you feel when you went for your eye test?

4. Do you know why it is important to see an optician?

Answers:

- To check that you're seeing as well as you can.
- To check the health of your eyes.
- To check if you need glasses, or that you're wearing the right pair of glasses.

5. Can anyone tell me how often you should visit an optician?

Answers:

- Every two years, unless your optician tells you to attend more often.
- If you're 60 or over and in Scotland, every year.
- As frequently as asked to by the optician.

Scene 7 – Going to the optician

Explain to participants that we're going to watch a film with actors acting out part of an eye test.

One of the actors is playing a woman named Jo, who hasn't been seeing well lately. Jo told her support worker about this, and the support worker has arranged for Jo to visit the optician to check her sight.

Explain to participants eye tests are important as they can check if your eyes are healthy. Opticians want you to get the most out of your eye test and feel happy and comfortable when you are having your eyes tested.

In this example scenario, let's see what happens at Jo's eye test when she is not feeling confident about having her eyes tested.



Play Scene 7



Discussion points

Ask the participants to think of what happened, and about any changes that would make the visit better.

1. What happened during this visit?

You would like the participants to notice that:

- Jo had been clearly uncomfortable and anxious during parts of the examination.
- The optician did not manage to complete the tests that she had wanted to do.

2. How could Jo have let the optician know about the problems she's been having with her sight?

Encourage the participants to consider that Jo could have:

- been prepared with information before she went in
- explained to her support worker before the visit, so that the support worker could have helped explain to the optician if necessary (for example, that Jo was having difficulty seeing the TV).

3. What could have been done about the lights?

Encourage the participants to consider that:

- Jo could have told the optician she does not like the dark and asked the optician to keep lights on a little bit.
- The optician could have explained to Jo in advance that the light was going to be dimmed to give her a bit of warning.

4. How much does Jo know about what's going to happen?

Do you think anyone explained to her about what would happen during the visit in advance?

Answer: It would seem that no one has explained what would happen during the visit to Jo in advance. This may have helped Jo and made her feel less anxious.

Scene 7 – Going to the optician



5. Is there something that could help to check whether Jo can see and read OK?

Suggested answers:

- The optician could check with Jo and her support worker to find out if Jo can read letters, before deciding which eye chart to use to check Jo's vision.
- If it turns out that Jo is unable to read, the optician could use an eye chart with pictures instead of letters and ask Jo to name the pictures. The optician could give Jo picture cards which match those on the chart and ask Jo to point to the right card. The picture charts can be used at different distances from Jo, to check Jo's level of vision at different distances.

6. The optician needs more time to be able to do all the tests properly with Jo. What should she do?

Answer: The optician could make another appointment with Jo. She could also ask the support worker to explain to Jo about what will happen well in advance before the next appointment. For example, by letting Jo know that the light may have to be dimmed or turned on and off, or that Jo may be asked to rest her chin on a chin rest on a machine to help the optician check the health of her eyes.

Once the optician has more information about Jo and what problems she has been having, the eye test can be tailored to Jo's needs. The optician would be aware that Jo gets nervous at appointments. The optician can help to reassure Jo that she is there to help and that she can tell the optician how she is feeling. The optician can also ask Jo how she can make her feel more comfortable during her eye test.

About your eye test

Explain to the participants now we are going to talk about our eye tests and how we can feel confident about attending our eye test. This can help get the most from the appointment to check our eyes.

Discussion points:

1. The optician wants to help you the best way they can. What could you and your support worker (or the person who is attending with you) do before the eye test that could help the optician?

Suggested answer:

- You, your support worker or the person who is going with you could tell the optician before the test about the important things about you that the optician should know. For example, if you do not like the dark, need more time to answer questions, are anxious about the visit, have difficulty reading letters or need a longer appointment. This will help the optician know more about you and how they can do their best to help you.

2. What could help you be more confident about attending your eye test and be more comfortable during a visit to the opticians?

Suggested answers:

- A visit to the optician's before your appointment could be arranged, to let you see the room and the equipment and meet the optician and other staff. This may make you feel more relaxed and understand what was going to happen at the appointment.

- Your support worker could put together some easy-to-read information about what to expect when visiting an optician so you can look at this before the visit.
- Your support worker could sit beside you to comfort you where necessary.
- Your support worker could offer to wear the glasses first or use the equipment first, to show you it was safe and show you what to do.
- You could ask your support worker or optician to shine the lights from the equipment used on their hands to show you that they do not hurt.
- The optician could use pictures or other tests designed for people with communication difficulties.
- If necessary your support worker could ask the optician to visit you at home.

3. What could your optician do that would be helpful for you in the future?

Suggested answer:

- After a successful eye examination, the optician could write up brief notes about the results of your eye test to give to you and your support worker. This is so that all other support staff and your family can understand the results of your eye test and any follow-up steps that are necessary.

Other useful information

Remind the participants that they can ask questions during their eye test. The optician wants to make sure everyone is comfortable and happy during the eye test, while they are checking the health of the eyes.

There are other tests that an optician may need to do, which have not been shown in the film. Here are some of them, along with alternative methods of carrying out the tests for people who have learning disabilities. You can explain these to the participants.

Eye drops

Sometimes the optician will need to put eye drops into the eyes of the person they are examining. This helps to check the health of the eyes.

Following a pen light

During an eye examination, an optician may ask the person to follow or fixate on a pen light to check eye movements. If the person being examined is anxious about the pen light, the optician could use something else which the person has an interest in, for example a favourite small toy or a lollipop/sweet.

Summary

We have come to the end of this session. To finish, ask the participants: "What will you do now to keep your eyes and your friends' eyes healthy?" Use the key messages below to help with some ideas.

Key messages summary

- Regular eye tests are important to get the best from your eyesight and to maintain your eye health.
- You should visit the optician every two years at minimum.
- Attend your eye test as often as your optician advises, or if you are having problems with your eyes or your vision since your last eye test.
- Eating well and wearing your glasses, as advised by your optician, are good for your eye health.
- Smoking and bright sunlight can be harmful to your eyes.
- Let your optician know in advance if you would like them to adapt the way they carry out their tests to meet your needs.
- You can visit the optician before your appointment to make yourself familiar with the environment and meet the staff.
- Ask for a longer appointment if you think you need it.
- People with learning disabilities are more likely to have sight problems.
- You may not notice slow changes to your vision, so regular eye tests are important.

- Some people might not notice that their sight is getting worse, or they might have difficulty telling people about what they are experiencing. They may be relying on someone else to notice the signs of their sight loss.
- Some signs that someone is finding it difficult to see include:
 - being clumsy
 - being less involved in activities
 - avoiding going out, especially in the dark
 - mobility difficulties, increased trips or falls.

If you notice these behaviours in yourself or others, an appointment with an optician should be arranged.

- If anyone has any questions about their eyes, vision or what happens at an eye test, please speak to your optician.

We hope you and the participants of your group enjoyed this "Healthy Eyes" training pack!

Thank you.

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