

Sight Loss
Friendly Church:
**Training
materials for
churches**



from TORCH TRUST



Introduction

The following training resources have been created to help your church on its sight loss friendly journey. Our main aim is for you, and people in your church, to have a better understanding of what it might be like for someone living with sight loss, resulting in your church being more sight loss aware, and friendly. You can use this training in a group, in a service, or go through it on your own. If there are things you are struggling with always remember you can call us or email us to get advice and assistance. All our contact details are on our website.

It is always good, if possible, to have someone who is living with sight loss at these sessions. They can offer their own perspective and experiences and help your understanding of the difficulties people often face. We may be able to liaise with one of our volunteers on your behalf to make this happen in your area if needed.

In the following pages there are three training sessions for you to work through. Each one has practical elements to it as well as facts and discussion points. There are documents on the resource page of the website which you will need to download or have available as you work through this training too. Eye masks are useful for this training, please contact Torch Trust if you are struggling to get some.



It is a serious point being made but we are quite sure there will be laughter and fun throughout, especially when trying some of the practical activities.

There are three sessions which make up this training and should take no longer than two hours in total to complete.

Session one

Raising Awareness of Sight Loss – an overview of different types of eye conditions and information about how sight loss is growing.

Session two

Understanding how sight loss can impact church life.

Session three

Advice and guidance to make your church more sight loss friendly.

Session one:

What is sight loss?

Objectives

- To learn that there are many different types of sight loss!
- To realise the scale of sight loss in the UK!
- To understand how difficult everyday activities can be!

Useful resources

- Glasses or blind folds – cling film
- Information about eye conditions
visit www.rnib.org.uk/eye-health/eye-conditions

Sight loss facts and figures

The leading causes of sight loss amongst registered blind and partially sighted people are:

- Age-related macular degeneration – 48%
- Glaucoma – 16%
- Cataract – 12%
- Retinitis Pigmentosa – 10%
- Diabetic eye disease – 8%

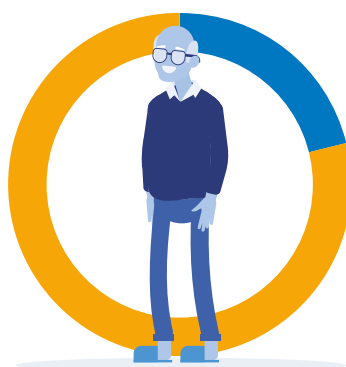
An estimated **285 million people** are living with sight loss worldwide, with 39 million people who are blind and 246 million people who are partially sighted. Globally, the leading causes of sight loss are uncorrected refractive error and cataract. In the UK 250 people are told that they are losing their sight **every day**.

The RNIB reports that there are approximately two million people currently living with sight loss, with that number set to **double** by 2050. The older you are, the greater your risk of sight loss.

The proportion of people living with sight loss is:



ONE IN NINE
people aged 60
years and over



ONE IN FIVE
people aged 75
years and over



ONE IN TWO
people aged 90
years and over

Feelings of wellbeing are lower amongst blind and partially sighted people when compared to the rest of the population. More than four in ten people attending low vision clinics are suffering from symptoms of clinical depression. 31 per cent of blind and partially sighted people were rarely or never optimistic about the future. Being told you are losing your sight can be difficult to come to terms with, with common effects being depression, reduced wellbeing and a process similar to bereavement. Only 17 per cent of people experiencing sight loss are offered emotional support in relation to their deteriorating vision.

Nearly half of blind and partially sighted people of working age said they had been treated unfairly by others in the last 12 months due to their sight loss. When people are asked to talk about the reasons why they experience difficulty or restrictions, whether in relation to travel, employment, technology, or leisure, by far the most common

reason given is their sight loss. Many people, including those with a range of other challenges and impairments, consider sight loss as the major factor in stopping them from doing all the things they would like to do in life.

Practical activities

Use your own glasses, or borrow a pair, and wrap the lenses in creased cling film. The more creased up the cling film is, the more difficult it will be to see clearly. You can also use an eye mask or blind fold then try the four practical exercises below. Please do not attempt anything that could be dangerous.



Exercise 1: Identifying money

You will need:

- Money: coins of different values as well as notes if possible
- Your glasses or eye masks

Now with your glasses, or eye mask, on:

1. Empty the money onto a table, or a tray.
2. Give someone, or see if you can find a £1 coin. Try this again with various amounts, such as £5.34 or 21p.
3. Now put the money in your pocket and try again.
4. Have someone hand you some money and see if you can tell how much it is.



Exercise 2: Reading

You will need:

- Books
- Your modified glasses or eye mask

Now with your glasses, or eye mask, on:

1. Try to read.

Exercise 3: Writing

You will need:

- Paper
- A variety of different pens
- Your modified glasses or eye mask

Now:

1. With your modified glasses on, try to write a sentence.
2. Try different pens to see if it makes a difference.

Exercise 4: Pouring liquids

You will need:

- A jug of cold water and a glass or beaker (please do **NOT** try this with hot liquids)
- A tea towel in case you make a mess
- Your modified glasses or eye mask

Now:

1. Put on your modified glasses or eye mask.
2. Fill up the glass, or beaker.
3. Drink from the glass, or beaker.
4. Fill the glass, or beaker, to a specific point (maybe half way, or stop at a point as if you were making a cup of tea and wanted to add milk).





Discussion/reflection

We appreciate that some of these activities would have seemed like fun and we hope that there has been some laughter as you have tried to do things without your normal sight. This is all fine but now it would be good to spend a little bit of time considering, and discussing, an individual who is losing their sight.

- How do you think it might affect an elderly person living on their own?
- How do you think this would effect a parent?
- How do you think it would affect a young person at school?

Session two:

Understanding how sight loss can impact church life

Objective

To understand the impact of sight loss on individuals in your church.

Useful resources

- Sight Loss Friendly Church video (on SLFC website)
- Success stories (on SLFC website)

Real life experiences:

“My church does try to include me by making sure I have braille copies of song books, however no one tells me what number song we’re about to sing – they just say ‘Now we’ll sing the next song on the screen.’”

“For people like myself it’s just very hard to enter in, feel a part of it. I’ve never had physical sight, I don’t know what it is to have sight. But amen for spiritual sight!”

“I went to churches and they tended to regard you as ‘the blind person’, rather than the Christian with unique gifts just as anyone else has. People’s expectations of you were very low.”

“I often feel left out at coffee times. I can’t go over and find someone to talk to because I don’t know who is where. I feel a bit stuck, hoping someone will come to me.”

Practical activity

- Go outside and put on your modified glasses or eye mask and walk back into the building. Try to get to your normal seat, if you have one. Find the toilets. Stay safe by having someone by your side while doing this.
- With the modified glasses on try to read a hymn book or follow words on a screen.

Discussion/reflection

If you are in a group ask one individual to wear an eye mask, or blind fold, for the next part of this session.

After reading the stories of people's experiences in churches, and your own experience of moving around your church blindfolded, talk about what you've become aware of and what this might mean for your church. Try asking these questions:

- How did it feel to enter the church?
- How easy was it to find different church resources, toilets or where to sit?
- Which places in the church were most/least accessible?
- Were there any really difficult or dangerous aspects around the church?
- How well do you think you could enjoy the church service with your vision obscured, or if you were blind folded?
- If someone has been wearing the eye mask, or blindfold; what was it like being part of the discussions without being able to see?
- What simple things could be done to make things easier for people with sight loss?

Session three:

Advice and guidance on how to make your church more sight loss friendly



THINK

about people
with sight loss



ASK

them what they
would like



ACT

with kindness and
consideration

Objective

To understand how, and be ready, to make your church more sight loss friendly.

Useful resources

- Best Practice Guidelines (available from SLFC online resources page)
- Preparing Materials (available from SLFC online resources page)
- Practical Guiding Tips (available from SLFC online resources page)

The three resources, *Best Practice Guidelines*, *Preparing Materials* and *Practical Guiding Tips*, are available to give you lots of ideas on how to make your church building, your services and your congregation more sight loss friendly.



Now that you have had chance to consider what challenges people with sight loss face, we want you to see there are simple things you can do that can make a big difference. We hope that because of the discussion points in the last two sessions we have already sparked ideas as to what you could do to make things more accessible for people with sight loss.

With the *Best Practice Guidelines* resource, talk about how you can more easily fully include people with sight loss during your services and at social activities.

With the *Preparing Materials* resource, talk about how information is visually presented in your church. Consider your notices, hymns, communications and resources for groups like home groups.

With the *Practical Guiding Tips* resource, take it in turns to guide and be guided around the church building. Use eye masks or blindfolds when you are being guided. This will help you understand how difficult it can be when navigating around a room.

One of the best pieces of advice we can offer to you is to have conversations with those in your church, or who may start coming to your church, who have sight loss. Ask questions to find out how you can best support them.