

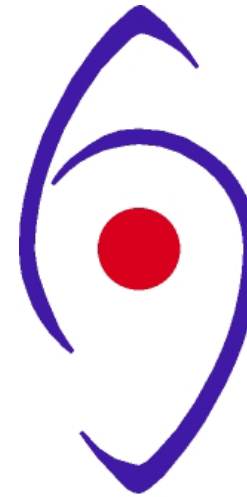
**Visual Impairment Services
Highland**

Visual Impairment Services Highland

The Resource Centre
38 Ardconnel street
Inverness
IV2 3EX

Tel: 01463 233663

E-mail: highlandvision@hotmail.com



**seeing a
future**

**coming to terms
with losing good
vision**

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This booklet deals sympathetically but honestly with these emotions, using quotes from several visually impaired people to do so.

There is a future. This booklet makes that clear. Many thousands of people who are losing their sight come through to enjoy fulfilling and successful lives.

SO CAN YOU

Losing good vision is hard; experiencing a severe loss of good vision is even harder. You may feel very depressed – that independence is now becoming dependence, opportunity becomes a threat, inclusion becomes isolation. Are these feelings familiar?

Most people do gradually learn to live with their sight loss. It isn't an easy journey, but there are many thousands of visually impaired people who have come through to enjoy successful and fulfilling lives.

This leaflet is about the feelings and reactions people experience when losing their sight. We hope it will encourage you to understand and explore your own feelings, and encourage you to take the next steps on the road to acceptance. There is also a section for your family and friends

EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT

Many people who are losing or have lost their sight describe similar feelings. But of course everyone is unique, with different challenges to face:

- ◆ Some people lose their sight suddenly, having been able to see perfectly well before
- ◆ Some people lose their sight gradually, making adjustments as they go along, until they realise how much their poor vision is restricting them
- ◆ Others suffer from conditions where their sight may improve or get worse unpredictably; this uncertainty can be very hard to live with

Everyone's circumstances are different. Whether you are young or old, male or female, single or in a relationship, confident or shy – all these things and many more will play a part in how you adjust

- ◆ they can also introduce to others in your own area who are also visually impaired by introducing you to a self-help group
- ◆ ensuring you receive a wide range of information on services and provisions for you as a visually impaired person

Losing your sight can be devastating. Even when it happens gradually, most people who lose their sight experience difficult feelings, as they try to adjust to a different way of life.

'I couldn't believe I was losing my sight. I just kept thinking, it must come back – I can't be going blind. I felt sick with fear'.

- ◆ helping you to continue reading and writing
- ◆ advising you about lighting, colour and contrast
- ◆ offering advice on help with bathing, dressing, shaving, etc.
- ◆ introducing you to leisure activities
- ◆ undertaking financial benefits checks to ensure you are receiving all the monies to which you are entitled
- ◆ introducing you to a range of aids and equipment such as low vision reading aids and others to help you perform everyday tasks with ease

It is important to note that most people do keep some vision, and that a great deal can be done to help you make the most of the vision

HOW DO PEOPLE REACT WHEN THEY LOSE THEIR SIGHT?

Most people who are losing or have lost their sight experience many painful thoughts and feelings at first. Many say that it is like a period of mourning, with a slow, gradual adjustment to their loss.

There are a whole new set of problems to cope with.

Here are some of the feelings that people often describe. This doesn't mean that you will necessarily feel all these things. And, of course, there will be times when you will feel more positive and hopeful. A few people are able to get on with their lives very quickly – but for most it takes time to adjust, and to start to build a new life.

SHOCK AND FEAR

**“I couldn’t believe I was losing my sight.
I just kept thinking it must come back – I
can’t be blind. I felt sick with fear’**

Losing your sight is a terrible shock for most people – especially when it has happened suddenly. A lot of people feel numb at first, and can’t believe what is happening to them. You may also feel extremely frightened.

A few people seem to take it all in their stride. A positive attitude is important of course but it’s usually better not to bottle things up.

FEELING VERY LOW

Most people who are losing or have lost their sight feel very depressed at some time. The present feels overwhelming, and the future seems hopeless, with no chance of things ever getting any better.

You may feel very lonely and isolated, and want to cut yourself off from the world and

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT SERVICES HIGHLAND

Visual Impairment Services Highland can offer you a range of training opportunities through their :

‘Opportunities For Independence’

programmes. A team of rehabilitation officers will work with you to achieve a level of safety and independence in such areas as:

- ◆ **ongoing emotional support to you and your family**
- ◆ **helping you get around both indoors and out**
- ◆ **helping you continue with everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning, using appliances, handling money**

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Many people who are losing their sight find it very helpful to talk things over. Sharing your difficulties with someone else can be an enormous relief. It can also reduce the sense of isolation that many people losing their sight experience.

You could talk to a close friend or family member about how you are feeling. Or you might find it helpful to speak to someone from your place of worship. Some people feel that they would rather not 'burden' people they know but would prefer to speak to a professional.

Our trained staff are available to speak to you and help you through this difficult time.

other people. Perhaps you feel stupid and worthless as a 'blind' person, and feel you will never be able to make anything of your life. It is important to realise that there is a great deal you can do and that these feelings will gradually pass.

FEELING ANXIOUS AND WORRIED

Not surprisingly many people feel very anxious about their situation.

'It's like a bereavement – like being in mourning for my sight'

You may find it difficult to concentrate or to sleep properly and always seem to be worrying about something: could I have done things differently? What if my sight gets even worse? What will I do with my life?

Losing your sight can really knock your confidence for six. Every task can seem overwhelmingly difficult, and it may be very tempting to give up and just let someone else do it for you.

But, don't lose heart. There is a great deal you will be able to do as you build up your confidence and skills.

FEELING ANGRY

It is very common for people who have lost their sight to feel very angry about what has happened to them. They ask: 'why me? What have I done to deserve this?'

It can also be terribly frustrating not to be able to do the things you used to, and to be dependent on others for help. You may well feel guilty about having these feelings. But don't. Anyone would react in this way.

IF THINGS START TO GET OUT OF HAND

Some people find it especially difficult to cope. You may feel that you are going mad and losing touch with reality. You may feel ecstatically happy one moment and unbearably depressed the next. Perhaps you have become aggressive, have thoughts of suicide, or try to blot out the pain with alcohol or drugs.

If they can learn to do the following things – and it won't be easy – it can make a tremendous difference:

- ◆ feel able to share the problem as a family and talk things over
- ◆ have a positive attitude to what the person losing their vision can achieve
- ◆ resist the impulse to try to do everything for the person (over-protectiveness can actually undermine someone's confidence and make them feel more depressed)
- ◆ realise that adjustment is a slow process that will demand a lot of patience from everyone concerned – and that it's quite natural to feel frustrated and angry sometimes
- ◆ be flexible about the roles that the different family members have
- ◆ make sure they find out about the support and help that is available, including help for themselves

LIVING WITH SOMEONE WHO IS LOSING THEIR SIGHT

When someone is losing or loses their sight, it can be very traumatic for their family and friends. They will often feel very distressed for the person, but also helpless and overwhelmed.

They may well have very negative ideas about sight loss, and feel pessimistic about the person's future (and their own). They may also resent the situation, and feel trapped and let down.

There is no doubt that when someone loses their sight this often puts considerable strain on relationships – both between couples and with family and friends. For example, one partner in a marriage/partnership may have been the main breadwinner in the family, and then becomes dependent on the other, this can cause friction. Children and young people may find it very upsetting to.

However, families and friends can be crucial in helping someone to rebuild their life.

If you are concerned about yourself or someone you know then it is a good idea to contact your GP.

HOW OTHERS REACT

Some people will be kind and supportive, but unfortunately others can be very insensitive. One of the things that visually impaired people often say is that other people's behaviour towards them changed when they lost their sight. Sadly Society's attitudes towards people with disabilities can be very negative and difficult to cope with.

Some people will assume that because you have poor vision you won't be able to do anything for yourself and need 'looking after'. It is very important that you don't fall in with this. Explain kindly but firmly that you need to learn to do things for yourself.

STARTING TO ADJUST

Most people find that they do gradually learn to live with losing their sight. The feelings of distress and despair slowly fade although they may return quite strongly from time to time.

“I did slowly come to terms with it. I gradually built up my confidence and learned how to do things for myself.”

Everyone adjusts to losing their sight in their own way, and at their own pace. A few people find that they can get on with life quite quickly. But for most the process of adjustment can take months or years. Some people say that the process of adjusting never really ends and that there are different issues and challenges to be faced at different times in their lives, just as there are in everyone's life, sighted or not.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Many people losing their sight describe moving from despair to realising that they have many inner strengths, and can do much more than they ever thought possible.

It can also be very helpful to learn to be organised and methodical about things. If your world becomes more familiar and predictable, this will build up your confidence and help you feel more safe and in control.

You may find that some of these practical steps can be very difficult emotionally. Using a white stick for the first time, for example, may confront you again with the painful reality of losing your sight and cause a temporary setback.

GETTING THE RIGHT HELP

It is important to get the support that is right for you. You might think you would like to talk things over with someone professional. Or you might prefer to talk to someone who has also lost their sight. Learning new skills and ways of coping is also a very good way of building up your confidence and morale.