

Kit 3:

Living with Blindness

**Guide Dog Discovery Centre
Curriculum Worksheets**



**Association
for the Blind of WA**
Guide Dogs WA



Teachers Guide to Kit 3: Living with Blindness

This kit focuses on the challenges faced by people who are blind or vision impaired.

In this guide:

- Key Messages & Learnings for This Module
- Quick Overview of the Provided Activities
- Other Suggested Learning Activities
- Background Reference Information
- Useful Websites
- Resources for Provided Activities
- Curriculum and Outcomes Information

Key Messages & Learnings for this module

1. There is an enormous natural variety of human abilities.
2. The concept of 'disability' is quite an arbitrary concept based simply on comparing one person's abilities with those of others.
3. Independence, mobility, access to opportunities and the way other people interact with you are among the daily issues facing people living with a disability.
4. Sensory disabilities such as blindness or deafness can be less obvious than other forms of disability but they can also be profoundly challenging both emotionally and psychologically, as well as physically.

Food for Thought: Others' attitudes can be more disabling than the actual disability.

For most people who are disabled, the problems of the disability itself are easier to adapt to and deal with than the problems caused by other people's attitudes, prejudices and lack of thought. Many disabilities could be far less 'disabling' with a few minor changes to the way we plan, organise and run our communities.

For people who are blind or vision impaired, life without sight can be very difficult. There are a great many logistical challenges to living in a sighted world. The question of how to get around safely is an important example. Specialist occupational therapists provide training in what is called 'orientation and mobility' to help people who are blind or vision impaired learn how to move around their community (and, if they want, the rest of the world!) safely. But for most people living without vision, logistical issues are not the most difficult thing. Most people who are blind or vision impaired say that the worst part is the feeling of isolation and deep sadness at the loss of what is usually a major source of joy for other people.

This leads to depression and other mental health problems which are much more common among people who are blind or vision impaired. In this context, it is not hard to understand why being able to make the most use of other senses, like hearing, is enormously important.

Quick Overview of the Provided Activities

3.1 Viewpoints

This activity focuses on three common eye conditions, developing awareness that disabilities such as blindness have many different causes and are experienced in many different ways. The worksheet has a fairly straightforward first page and an optional second page of more reflective extension questions.

3.2 Challenges & Changes

In this activity, students focus attention on specific aspects of their experience (in this case their classroom experience) that would be different for someone who is blind or vision impaired. The exercise of identifying and observing 'challenges' then takes students to the corollary activity of imagining ways to mitigate these challenges.

This activity introduces the concepts of access and 'universal design' and also introduces the concept that making things better for people who have a disability can make things better for other people too.

3.3 Imagine If

This activity explores the social reality of a disability like blindness. It engages students in considering in detail what everyday situations would be like for someone who is blind or vision impaired. It leads well to a role play exercise but can also be easily adapted for writing or visual arts exercises.

3.4 DIY Friendship

This is an activity designed to develop awareness of the unnecessary social isolation often experienced by people who have a disability, particularly a sensory disability such as blindness or deafness. It is based around a role play phase with group reflection and could be a useful starting point for creative writing or through performance or visual arts.

3.5 Willing & Able

This worksheet is designed to be completed in groups as a self-contained and straightforward activity. It focuses on the concept of disability relative to the concept of ability and reinforces the awareness that there is a natural (and wide) variety of human abilities.

3.6 The Task Master

This is intended as a homework-only activity which gives students the opportunity to engage with parents and other family members about notions of ability. By choosing the length of time, the number of tasks which you expect to be tried and the level of reflection on each, you can adapt this activity to suit the level at which your students are working, as well as to suit the workload at any given stage of the school year.

Other Suggested Learning Activities

- Arrange a guest speaker or other opportunities to meet and ask questions of people who are blind or who have other disabilities and are finding positive ways to live with their disability.
- After a class discussion, engage students in role play activities to explore how blindness can affect the way people interact in various everyday situations and how making different behaviour choices can affect everyone's experiences. Ask the students to reflect not only on the experiences for someone with the disability but also the others involved.
- Challenge your students to write a short story about living with blindness.
- Invite students to bring in board or card games from home. Assign a whole afternoon to 'just playing games together' except that students take turns playing blindfolded. You could consider making this a more significant event, calling it an Olympiad and inviting parents to take part.
- Create a Teamwork Tower Competition. In small groups, students work together to plan and build a structure such as a tower but only blindfolded students are allowed to construct the tower; their non-blindfolded team members can only do support tasks.
- Engage your students in finding out more about disabled sports. The Paralympics is a good place to start – assign one type of sport to each group and ask them to prepare an oral report.
- Ask students to keep a record (for a week or even a month) of all the times they see someone with a disability featured in a TV program or movie. Hold a class discussion about their observations, the reasons behind them and the consequences.
- Every day for a week (or each week for a month or so) finish with a reflection discussion about the activities and achievements of the day (or week) and how someone who is blind or vision impaired might have experienced them. Encourage thought about what could have been done differently to make the experience better.

Reading Material

Your school librarian may be able to suggest some books which deal with disability issues. Here are two suggestions:

1. *Wintering Well* by Lea Wait (Ages 8 – 12) Fiction – tells the story of girl whose older brother loses a leg in a farming accident.
2. *Boss of the Pool* by Robin Klein (Ages 8 -12) – A novel about trust and overcoming prejudice in as a teenage girl teaches a disabled boy to swim.

Playground Practice

Plan and hold a safe sports lesson that your students experience with a disability. Try to make the lesson as 'normal' as possible in all other respects except that the students is only allowed to use one hand, or one leg or wears a patch over one eye.

Throwing and catching practice with soft balls or hoops are a fairly safe and easy way to do this.

Useful Websites

www.drc.org.uk/citizenship/index.asp
www.disability.wa.gov.au/forcommunity.html

Background Reference Material

What is a Disability?

A useful definition of disability is “any continuing condition that restricts everyday activities.” In more detail, disability refers to a condition which results from an intellectual, psychiatric, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical impairment (or a combination of these). The term ‘disability’ is generally used for conditions which are permanent or likely to be permanent but it can include conditions which are episodic in nature. We think of disabilities as conditions which substantially reduce someone’s capacity for communication, social interaction, learning or mobility.

Disability in Society

More than 70 000 people in Western Australia are living with a disability and anyone can find themselves with a disability at any stage of life.

In recent decades, significant progress has been made on integrating people with disabilities in society, but much more progress is still required if people with disabilities are to be able to live their lives to their potential. In particular, people with disabilities still struggle with employment issues, often find it difficult to obtain employment equal to their abilities and experience significantly lower levels of employment than non-disabled people. Employment disadvantages can then lead to other issues including economic hardship and health problems, including depression. These disadvantages do not only affect the person who is disabled but also directly affect their family and social network and indirectly affect the entire community, including increased health costs and lost productivity.

What can be done?

With the assistance of appropriate aids and services, the restrictions experienced by many people with a disability may be overcome. And with the support of well-informed, considerate decision-making by a community, the consequences of a disability can be greatly reduced - for everyone.

The most important things are for us all to think inclusively, to accept that the difficulty of a particular disability can be made much worse or much better by a society's decisions, and to focus on people's abilities, rather than their disabilities.

This would help us better understand disability and how to minimise it when making decisions about how we; structure jobs, look for employees, decide who to hire, design buildings and public places, run schools and other educational programs, conduct sporting activities (for any age).

Curriculum Framework

Learning Areas and Outcomes information for this kit

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| Society & environment | INVESTIGATION, COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students investigate the ways in which people interact with each other and with their environments in order to make informed decisions and implement relevant social action. • Students investigate aspects of time, place, culture, resources and systems to understand and act on important issues in their social and environmental world. In these investigations, they use skills of critical inquiry and ethical decision making in order to become better-informed, active citizens. |
| Society & environment | ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students demonstrate active citizenship through their behaviours and practices in the school environment, in accordance with the principles and values associated with the democratic process, social justice and ecological sustainability. • The behaviours and practices students display as active citizens reflect their commitment to the values and principles associated with the democratic process, social justice and ecological sustainability. This is the basis for responsible social and environmental action. • Students critically analyse heritages and traditions of social justice and human rights, and policies and practices related to discrimination and disadvantage. Through this analysis they demonstrate behaviours consistent with the values associated with social justice, such as a respect and concern for the welfare, contribution, rights and dignity of all people; fairness and equity in dealing with people; and readdressing disadvantage and changing discriminatory and violent practices. |
| Society & environment | NATURAL AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students understand that systems provide order to the dynamic natural and social relationships occurring in the world. • Students recognise that a number of social systems that exist vary both in their function (e.g. political, legal, and economic) and scale (e.g. family unit, national, community, global). • Students understand that the creation of rules and laws is necessary to ensure civic rights and associated responsibilities. They further understand that where rights are infringed and responsibilities are not met, consequences are evident. |

Curriculum Framework

Learning Areas and Outcomes information for this kit (continued)

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Health & Physical Education | ATTITUDES AND VALUES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students exhibit attitudes and values that promote personal, family and community health, and participation in physical activity. • Students identify attitudes and values for a healthy, active lifestyle and demonstrate values consistent with the prevention of ill-health, the acceptance of personal responsibility for their health and physical activity levels, respect for social justice principles and a commitment to personal achievement. • Students recognise and value, safe and supportive environments. They exhibit safe practice in the classroom, in play and in games, and observe occupational health and safety guidelines where appropriate. • Students recognise and respect the principles of social justice. They demonstrate this by being inclusive and just in their interpersonal relationships in classroom, peer, friendship and team situations. They know and protect their own rights and respect the rights of others. In physical activity and sport, they recognise inequities and do not discriminate on the grounds of gender, race, culture, physical or mental disability or experiential background. Their actions reflect ethical considerations. |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---|

Viewpoints

There are many different kinds of blindness, each with different causes.

What to do

Here are four different versions of the same picture. One shows the original photograph and the others have been altered to show how the image would look to people living with three very common eye conditions: Tunnel Vision, Short Sightedness and Long Sightedness. Can you match the image to the condition? (HINT: see the clues below)



.....



.....



.....



.....



Tunnel Vision means that the person can only see clearly in the middle of what they are looking at. Everything else is either very dark or blurry.

Short sightedness (sometimes called Myopia) means the person will be able to see close by things quite clearly but far away things will look blurry.

With **long sightedness**, the person will be able to see far away things quite clearly but close by things will look blurry.

Ten Things

Choose one of these three eye conditions. Imagine what it would be like if your eyesight changed this way. List ten things that would change in your life.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.



Challenge Questions

Do you know anyone with any of these conditions?

Do you know anyone with any other eye condition?

If you do, ask if they are happy to talk to you about it. Imagine you are a magazine journalist: conduct an interview about their eye condition and write an article.

If you don't know anyone, imagine what might be different for someone if they developed one of these eye conditions?

Challenges & Changes

Some things are everyday challenges for people who are vision impaired or blind. Many of these could be improved or solved with simple changes.

For example, writing with a light colour pen or using small size letters can make things very difficult for some people to read.

What to do

Think of 5 things that might make your classroom or school difficult for someone who is blind or who has a vision impairment.

| |
|--------------|
| Challenge 1: |
| Challenge 2: |
| Challenge 3: |
| Challenge 4: |
| Challenge 5: |

Now think of 5 ideas that could make things easier and safer (or more fun) for someone who is blind or vision impaired.

| |
|---------|
| Idea 1: |
| Idea 2: |
| Idea 3: |
| Idea 4: |
| Idea 5: |



The good news is that adapting things to make it easier for someone with a disability like blindness can often make things better for other people, too.

Which of your ideas would make things easier, safer or more enjoyable for members of your school community who are not blind or vision impaired?

.....

.....

.....

DIY Friendship



Making friends is something we can all practice.

Let's brush up on our friendship-making skills and think about what making friends might be like for someone who is blind or vision impaired.

Step 1: Just say hello

This often seems the hardest but it doesn't have to be. Find someone in your class you don't know well. Go up and say hello, introduce yourself and smile and invite them to introduce themselves.

Step 2: Get interested

A good way to get to know someone is to ask them about themselves. To start with it can help if you ask them some open-ended questions which don't have yes/no or one word answers. So instead of asking what someone's favourite colour is or if they like Harry Potter books you could ask what they did on the weekend or what their hobbies are.

With your partner, try to think of open-ended questions you could ask each other. Some topic ideas may include family, holidays, hobbies, friends, favourite animals, foods etc.

What have you learnt about your partner that you did not know before?

| |
|---|
| 1 |
| 2 |
| 3 |
| 4 |
| 5 |

Step 3: Practice – but with a difference

Try these steps again with a new partner, but this time, wear a blindfold.

What difference does it make for the person blindfolded?

What difference does it make for the person who is not blindfolded?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Willing & Able

Some people are unusual because they have a particular ability or 'talent'. Famous scientists, inventors, singers, dancers, circus performers or sportspeople are all good examples.

Can you think of some people you know who have an unusual ability?

.....
.....
.....

Other people may not have an ability that most other people have. If this ability is something most people do everyday, not having it can be thought of as a 'disability'.

In your group, create a list of abilities that most humans use most days (for example, most humans walk).

.....
.....
.....
.....

Which of the abilities on your list are most important? Why? Discuss this with your group and write down what you agree – or disagree on.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....



.....
.....
.....

Choose an ability that most or all humans do NOT have. Singing, seeing in infra-red, flight, being able to breathe underwater are all examples.

Ability:

Now imagine if most humans DID have that ability.

Describe what the world would be like.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Next imagine what it would be like if you were one of the few people who did not have that ability? What would it be like to live in a world where nearly everyone else could do something you could not?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Homework Mission

Here are some abilities that some people find easy to do well, some find hard and others find almost impossible.

Think about what you can do, what your friends can do and what your family members can do. Count how many people you know who can do each of these.

| Ability | Me | Classmates | Family | Other people I know |
|-----------------|----|------------|--------|---------------------|
| Running fast | | | | |
| Running far | | | | |
| Dancing | | | | |
| Playing music | | | | |
| Singing | | | | |
| Cooking | | | | |
| Balancing | | | | |
| Gymnastics | | | | |
| Other languages | | | | |
| Woodwork | | | | |
| Computers | | | | |
| Writing | | | | |
| Sewing | | | | |
| Drawing | | | | |
| Gardening | | | | |
| Swimming | | | | |
| Jumping | | | | |
| Maths | | | | |
| Juggling | | | | |
| Ball sports | | | | |
| Chess | | | | |
| Computer games | | | | |
| Fixing things | | | | |
| Strength | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Do a quick family survey.
What ability do people wish they had?

.....
.....

The Task Master



We all do lots of tasks every day. Living with a disability can mean approaching these tasks a little differently.

What to do

1. Think of 10 things you do each day that might be more difficult if you were blind.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. Now think of another 10 things that other people (such as the adults you know) do every day that might be more difficult if they were blind.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Home – Work With a Difference



Try everyday tasks wearing a blindfold (ask for adult supervision).

Record what each task is like and any ideas about what could help.

| Task | What it's like blindfolded | Ideas for what could help |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Getting dressed</i> | | |
| <i>Having breakfast</i> | | |
| <i>Brushing your teeth & hair</i> | | |
| <i>Packing your bag</i> | | |
| <i>Making your bed</i> | | |
| <i>Getting to school</i> | | |
| <i>Tying shoelaces</i> | | |
| <i>Helping out</i> | | |
| <i>Putting things away</i> | | |
| <i>Making an afternoon snack</i> | | |
| <i>Doing your homework</i> | | |
| <i>Eating dinner</i> | | |
| <i>Making a phone call</i> | | |
| | | |