

Habilitation Developing independence for children with vision impairments

‘...the overriding goal is to maximise the child or young person’s independence, opening the way in the future, to further study, employment and an independent life.’
(Wall, 2017)

What is ‘Habilitation’?

Habilitation is the development of independence and gaining new skills based on an individual’s needs.

Training consists of **Mobility, Orientation and Independent Living skills (ILS)**. Social skills are also developed. These skills will prepare the child/young person with vision loss for adult life and independence, through an individual plan.

Mobility

Moving around safely: depending on the individual may include: early movement, motor skills, body awareness, sighted guide, pre-cane skills, long cane skills and wheelchair mobility. Moving safely indoors and outdoors is the aim.



Orientation

Strategies to find where they are and how to get to where they want to be. This could be using clues and cues such as smells, sounds and landmarks. It could also involve familiarising themselves with their classroom or using technology devices to aid navigation. Safe outdoor travel and road crossing is also part of this.



Independent Living Skills (ILS)

Everyday practical skills such as:

Kitchen skills, hygiene, money management, cleaning, asking for help, social skills and shopping skills.



Why Habilitation?

Many learning experiences can occur accidentally through observation, this is mainly through vision.

80% of learned information is through vision, therefore for a child with different degrees of vision loss, this is less likely to occur.

The Qualified Habilitation Specialist (QHS)

The QHS will assess, plan, carry out, monitor and create a programme for each individual pupil.

Important individuals in their training are: Teachers, Qualified Teacher for the Visually Impaired (QTVI), Learning Support Assistants (LSA), Peers, Medical Professionals and Parents.

LSA's, parents and those who work with the child daily may be trained in order to consolidate the skills with the pupil on a daily basis.

Transitions

An essential aspect of Habilitation is preparing pupils for changes such as:

- ★ Transition from home to primary school
- ★ Transition from primary to secondary school
- ★ Transition from secondary school to university
- ★ Transition from class to class