

## 1. Family support

The program provides support to parents when their child has been diagnosed with blindness or low vision. These services are provided by family support workers who are graduate-level social workers specially trained in the impact of a visual impairment on child development.

The family support worker will help the family understand and cope with the implications of the diagnosis and help them make informed decisions about support services.

## 2. Intervention services

For a child with visual impairment, touch, hearing and the use of remaining or residual vision are critically important for learning and development. Support by trained and knowledgeable professionals in the area of visual impairment is essential to help the child develop these senses to the best of his or her ability.

Intervention services are provided by specially trained early childhood blind/low vision consultants in the family's home. The consultant teaches parents how to support their child's development in the following areas

- intentional movement (orientation and mobility)
- development of motor skills (e.g., rolling, reaching, crawling, walking, and use of hands to manipulate and explore objects)
- daily living skills (e.g., eating, dressing, toileting)
- concept development (e.g., object identification, function, and characteristics)
- social and emotional development
- language and communication development
- how to make the most of residual vision
- how to use all the senses to promote development

## 3. Consultation services

When your child enters a child care or early learning centre, Blind – Low Vision Program staff will help the early childhood educators at that centre learn how to best work with and teach your child.

## Regional Blind – Low Vision Early Intervention Programs

Ontario's Blind - Low Vision Early Intervention Program provides its services through the following regional offices:

Windsor-Essex and Kent-Chatham  
contact "Talk 2 Me"  
(519) 252-0636

Southwest Region  
Elgin-St. Thomas, Grey Bruce  
Owen Sound, Huron, Lambton,  
Middlesex-London, Oxford, Perth  
(519) 663-5317 ext. 2224  
or 1-877-818-8255

Central South Region  
Hamilton, Niagara, Brant and  
Haldimand-Norfolk  
(905) 385-7927 ext. 227  
or 1-866-826-4327 ext. 227  
[www.ascy.ca/ascy\\_earlywords.html](http://www.ascy.ca/ascy_earlywords.html)

Central West  
Halton, Peel, Waterloo and  
Wellington-Dufferin  
contact Erinoak  
(905)855-3557  
or 1-877-374-6625  
TTY 905-855-4925  
[www.erinoakkids.ca](http://www.erinoakkids.ca)

Toronto  
Toronto Preschool Speech and  
Language Services  
416-338-8255  
TTY 416-338-0025  
[www.tpsls.on.ca](http://www.tpsls.on.ca)

Simcoe County and Muskoka-  
Parry Sound  
Children's Development Services  
(705) 739-5696  
or 1-800-675-1979

Tri-Region  
York Region, Durham, Haliburton,  
Kawartha and Pine-Ridge  
1-888-703-5437  
TTY 905-762-1350  
[www.beyond-words.org](http://www.beyond-words.org)

Southeastern Region  
Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox  
& Addington (KFL&A), Leeds,  
Grenville and Lanark (LGL), and  
Hastings and Prince Edward (HPE)  
counties  
(613) 549-1232 ext. 145  
or 1-800-267-7875 X 145  
TTY 613-549-7692  
or 1-866-299-1136  
[www.healthunit.on.ca](http://www.healthunit.on.ca)

Ottawa  
Ottawa, Renfrew County and  
District and Eastern Ontario  
contact "FirstWords"  
(613) 688-3979 or  
1-866-432-7447  
TTY 613-820-7427  
[www.pqhcs.com](http://www.pqhcs.com)

Northeast Region  
Manitoulin-Sudbury, Algoma,  
Cochrane, and Nipissing-  
Timiskaming  
contact "Wordplay Jeux de Mots"  
(705) 522-6655  
1-877-522-6655

Thunder Bay  
Thunder Bay District Health Unit  
(807) 625-5922  
1-888-294-6630, ext. 5922  
[www.tbduh.com](http://www.tbduh.com)

Northwest Region  
Kenora Rainy River  
contact "North Words"  
1-877-553-7122  
[www.northwords.com](http://www.northwords.com)

### For more information, contact:

INFOline 1-866-821-7770  
TTY 1-800-387-5559  
[www.children.gov.on.ca](http://www.children.gov.on.ca)

Version française disponible  
en communiquant avec  
le 1 866 821-7770  
ATS 1 800 387-5559  
[www.children.gov.on.ca](http://www.children.gov.on.ca)

## BLIND – LOW VISION EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM



Services for children  
who are blind or  
have low vision

Ontario's Blind – Low Vision Early Intervention Program is designed to give children who are born blind or with low vision the best possible start in life. Specialized family-centred services are funded by the province and are available for children from birth to Grade 1.

The program provides education and support for parents so they can encourage the healthy development of their children. Parents learn to help their children develop the skills they need for daily activities at home and in early learning and care settings.

Without special support from an early age, a child who is blind or has low vision may have trouble learning to talk, explore and make friends when he or she begins school. A child who is blind or has low vision is at a significant risk for difficulties in all areas of development, including:

- communication and language
- fine and gross motor skills
- understanding and thought processes
- social skills
- emotional development
- self help

With the right intervention from skilled professionals, parents can learn how to encourage the healthy development of their children, and help them learn the skills they will need to succeed in school.

## Program services

When children are diagnosed with blindness or low vision, a referral can be made to the local Blind – Low Vision Program by a physician, ophthalmologist, optometrist, parent or caregiver. Check the back of this brochure to find the program closest to you.

The Blind – Low Vision program offers three types of services:

1. Family support
2. Intervention services
3. Consultation services

These developmental milestones show some of the milestones that mark early vision development and the progress of young children as they grow. Watch for any signs that your baby is not meeting these milestones and talk to your physician right away if you have any concerns.

If you have concerns about your child's vision, don't wait. The sooner a problem is identified the sooner your child can have the help he or she needs for the best opportunity for healthy development.

## Developmental milestones

### By 6 weeks

- stares at surroundings when awake
- briefly looks at bright lights/objects
- blinks in response to light
- eyes and head move together

### By 3 months

- eyes glance from one object to another
- eyes follow a moving object/person
- stares at caregiver's face
- begins to look at hands, food and bottle

### By 6 months

- eyes move to inspect surroundings
- eyes move to look for source of sounds
- swipes at or reaches for objects
- looks at more distant objects
- smiles and laughs when he or she sees you smile and laugh

### By 12 months

- eyes turn inward as objects move close to the nose
- watches activities in surroundings for longer time periods
- looks for a dropped toy
- visually inspects objects and people
- creeps toward favourite toy

### By 2 years

- guides reaching and grasping for objects with the vision
- looks at simple pictures in a book
- points to objects or people
- looks for and points to pictures in books
- looks where he or she is going when walking and climbing

## As their vision develops, babies enjoy:

### By 6 weeks

- looking at you while you hold them close
- looking at toys with bright colours
- looking at objects with reflective qualities (such as mirrors)
- watching mobiles with simple black and white shapes
- watching things that move

### By 3 months

- studying your face
- watching toys move from the side to the front of them
- looking at and reaching for objects hanging across their cribs
- toys with bright colours and interesting patterns
- using a night light in their rooms

### By 6 months

- looking at their reflection in a mirror
- looking back and forth between two favourite objects
- seeing the world from different positions (e.g., high chair, floor, other furniture)
- toys that have complex patterns and toys that move (e.g., "jack in the box")
- playing "peek-a-boo" games

### By 12 months

- putting toys in and out of containers (and also in their mouths)
- playing with similar objects of different sizes (e.g., stacking rings, nesting cups, blocks)
- looking at board books with thick cardboard pages and simple coloured pictures
- pushing buttons or twisting knobs to make toys start
- watching outside activities through a window

### By 2 years

- reading books with pictures of simple scenes and objects
- looking at photographs of family members and pets
- playing with simple board puzzles
- using blocks to play with and to build towers
- making trips outside to the store, the park, the library to watch people and activities

## You should continue to monitor your child's development

It is important to monitor your child's visual development, since early identification of a problem can sometimes eliminate or decrease the risk of long-term complications. If you notice that your child has any of the following symptoms, talk to your doctor immediately:

- swollen or encrusted eyelids
- bumps, sores or styes on or around the eyelids
- drooping eyelids
- does not make eye contact with you by three months of age
- does not watch or follow an object with the eyes by three months
- haziness or whitish appearance inside the pupil
- frequent "wiggling," "drifting," or "jerky" eye movements
- misalignment between the eyes (eye turns or crossing of eyes)
- lack of coordinated eye movements
- drifting of one eye when looking at objects
- turning or tilting of the head when looking at objects
- squinting, closing or covering of one eye when looking at objects
- excessive tearing when not crying
- excessive blinking or squinting
- excessive rubbing or touching of the eyes
- avoidance of or sensitivity to bright lights

