

# **Asking for Help ~ Sheila Turner, Independent Living Skills Teacher**

**735-0699**

Living and learning to cope with low vision can be very difficult. Those who are visually impaired may feel depressed and isolated. They can become frustrated because routine tasks may now be hard to accomplish. Sports, hobbies and other leisure activities sometimes seem almost impossible. The key for people with vision loss is to try taking on challenges and resolving problems without becoming overwhelmed by negative emotions. Ironically, to remain as independent as possible requires a team effort. This team effort should include professionals such as physicians and visual rehabilitation specialists, community volunteers, and loved ones. There may also be support groups for those with low vision where members can discuss common issues and coping strategies, and exchange information. Much like the **Edith Bishel Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired** “Coping Social Event”.

Contact the **Edith Bishel Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired** for assistance. We are located at 628 N. Arthur Street Kennewick, WA 99336 or call us at (509) 735-0699 or visit our web site at [www.edithbishelcenter.org](http://www.edithbishelcenter.org) .

## **Mission Statement**

We exist to enrich the independent quality of life for the blind and visually impaired persons.

## **Vision**

We strive to be the premier provider of individualized support services to our clients in the Southeastern Washington and Northeastern Oregon.

## Services and Programs

We focus our endeavors on the following essential client needs:

- Low vision examinations and assessments
- Independent living and low vision aids
- Personalized independent living skills training
- Customized computer training and education services
- Socialization opportunities
- Coping with vision loss support groups
- Library access to specialized print, audio, video and Braille resources
- Community link to low vision services

When a loved one is visually impaired, family and friends may not be sure what type of assistance is needed or desired, and consequently they may overprotect or withdraw. Those with low vision need to openly communicate and ask for help if necessary, but also assert their independence. Frank discussion among everyone affected often leads to better understanding. Family and friends may find it useful to divide up responsibilities if they are asked or want to volunteer to help. These responsibilities may include adapting the home and ensuring it is safe, running errands, making and keeping medical and other types of appointments, helping with meals, house cleaning and other tasks, social activities and outings.

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# **Adjusting the Home ~ Sheila Turner, Independent Living Skills Teacher**

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With some adjustments, those with low vision can live independently, continue to carry out daily activities and take pleasure in hobbies. In the home, remember the following general guidelines: increase lighting for tasks; control glare; use magnification; and increase contrast. Over time, people with low vision will likely come up with individual, innovative solutions to reflect their needs, help them function better in the home and increase their enjoyment of life. Seek help through friends, family and volunteer groups to implement these adaptations.

## ***Suggestions for the Home***

The following suggestions can make the home safer and more “operational”:

- Improve lighting. Use overhead lights (determine which type of bulbs are best); use task lights to direct light where it is needed; install under-cabinet lighting and extra lighting in hallways and on stairs; use dimmer switches to control the amount of light in rooms; use night lights.
- Control glare; use blinds and curtains in windows when necessary.
- Be especially careful on stairs. Make sure there is plenty of light, especially on the top and bottom steps (or paint them in contrasting colors); install handrails on both sides; consider marking the edges of steps with bright tape.
- In the bathroom: install grab bars; put contrasting tape around the edge of the tub; use non-skid, brightly colored mats; always turn hot water off first; use a contrasting color toilet seat, towels and a bright rubber bathmat inside the tub.
- Consider removing doors, replacing them with bright curtains or painting them contrasting colors; magnetic door stops can help. Ensure that thresholds are flush with the floor.
- Use brightly colored tape or bumps to mark light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats and other fixtures.

- Ensure that area rugs are skid-proof and properly tacked down; use contrasting colors to better see them. Replace worn or broken tiles and worn carpeting.
- Arrange furniture so that it does not impede movement, especially in hallways.

## **Sheila Turner, Independent Living Teacher can assist each individual in their own home environment.**

### ***For daily activities***

The following suggestions can ease daily tasks:

- Use optical devices such as magnifiers, telescopes and closed circuit TV cameras; If glare is a problem, consider wearing sunglasses with amber or yellow lenses to help control it, even inside the home.
  - Label medications with large print stickers or use special magnifiers for bottles; keep medications organized.
  - For the computer, use a large type keyboard, larger monitors and screen magnifiers; consider audio aids such as screen reading software. Many websites have adjustable print size and contrast options.
  - Use large text when reading, doing puzzles, playing cards, etc.; listen to audio tapes and books on CD.
  - Sit closer to the TV; ensure that lighting is optimal and control glare.
  - Use the array of available household items designed for those with low vision: clocks, watches and telephones with large letters; “talking” scales and tape measures; special safety cutting devices; and large print labels for medications, grocery items, etc.
  - Organize household items in the kitchen; bedroom and bathroom by always putting them in the same place, especially frequently used items, such as keys, shoes, coats, glasses, pots and pans. Develop a system for grouping clothes and arranging food.
  - Use large bumpy stickers on the thermostat, stove and other appliances; mark key positions with raised labels.
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