



Habilitation



Accessto
Education

What is



Habilitation is
the new term
for *Mobility and
Independence
Skills*



Birmingham City Council

Education Habilitation Service

For children and young people with a
sight problem

Education Habilitation Service

for children and young people with a sight problem

What is habilitation ?

Habilitation is the new term that is being used to cover the range of Mobility and Independence skills (ILS) that visually impaired children and young people need to be taught. Rehabilitation relates more to helping adults re-learn skills that they had in the past, but have lost as their sight deteriorates. Children have to learn these skills from scratch - hence habilitation. For ease they are often simply referred to as mobility, independence or life skills.

Mobility is the skill to move independently through the environment



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Mobility training, as offered by Birmingham City Council Education Habilitation Service, enhances the ability of children with a sight problem to be a safe and confident travellers both indoors and out, and encourages them to be as independent as possible within the scope of their age and abilities.

Birmingham employs all Registered Qualified Habilitation Specialists (RQHS) to work with their children and young people to provide high quality training in line with the National Standards for Habilitation training. At all times the safety of the child is paramount.

Mobility training

The majority of children absorb information and knowledge of the environment from visual sources, but for a child with a sight problem this may not be so and alternative strategies need to be employed. It is not true that blind people have better hearing than fully sighted people. Listening skills have to be taught to maximize the amount of information that can be absorbed this way. Neither are all blind children totally blind, it may be possible to help them learn to use even a small amount of vision to good effect.

It is a common misconception that all blind people have guide dogs. Those who do opt for guide dogs, still need all the same mobility skills in place to make them eligible for guide dog training and to offer them an alternative should their dog be ill. Very young children cannot apply for dogs, but must still learn to get from A to B, hence the need for mobility training geared specifically towards the needs of children and young people, centered on recognising and meeting their individual requirements. Older pupils considering applying for a dog at a later date should discuss this in the first instance with their Habilitation Specialist, who can then put them in touch with guide dogs as and when appropriate.

Mobility should only be taught by RQH Specialists, or appropriately qualified Habilitation assistants under the direction of an Habilitation Specialist. Schools may be asked to support the use of specialist strategies and techniques within the building.

abilitation syllabus... or what is taught

Habilitation training is not an academic subject, and whilst a full syllabus and scheme of work has been prepared, most children will only need to cover certain aspects. These documents can be made available to parents, although a charge may be made to cover costs if a full personal copy is required. Documentation is supplied on the understanding that they are for information only and should not be used by anyone other than Registered Qualified Habilitation Specialists to teach children and young people.

Habilitation includes Mobility, Independence and Life skills.

Mobility generally covers all the aspects around moving from A to B as independently as possible. This would include familiarisation with the environment as well as specific routes. These routes may range between 10 metres or 10 miles depending on the skills and abilities of individual pupils. The Habilitation Service offers one to one mobility and ILS training and also some additional small group short courses in ILS. Specific topics include

- **Body awareness** - developing an understanding of body parts and how the body moves
- **Listening skills** - learning how to listen and what to listen for
- **Orientation** - knowing where they are at any given point and how to get to where they want to be, including how to follow directions
- **Maximising vision** - how to make the most of residual vision, including use of low vision aids
- **Basic personal safety** - including name address etc, what to do if lost and seeking help. How to avoid getting into difficulties when alone
- **Road safety** - from simple rules to complex crossings, the level achieved depends very much on age and ability of each individual
- **Self help** - beginning with independent dressing and feeding skills and culminating in basic food preparation skills,
 - Dressing skills
 - Personal Care
 - opening tins and packets,
 - cutting, slicing grating etc
 - weighing and safely using the microwave
- **Social and life skills** - dealing with the general public
 - Handling money
 - Using the phone, including mobiles and apps
 - Learning acceptable behaviour and dress
 - Using household electrical appliances
- **Independent travel** - may include **learning cane skills** before proceeding to specific routes. These routes could be in school, between home and school, to and from work experience, college transition, or for leisure purposes

Eligibility - who can have help from the Habilitation Service?

Any child or young person with an uncorrectable sight problem, educated within Birmingham Schools Education and aged approximately between 2 and 18 may have an assessment by the Habilitation Service. Support for students outside schools education or older than 18 can be bought in on an individual basis. Visual loss need not be their prime disability and they do not need to have a statement or EHC. Recommendations will then be made regarding the need for subsequent training. Referral forms are available on request from the Habilitation Service or downloadable from the SENCo Sensory Support pages.

Habilitation Specialists like to work closely with parents and schools to ensure maximum benefits for the young person. Staff continue to work during holiday times, making home visits to support and liaise with parents as well as teaching home area routes. There is a one week Summer Activity Scheme for visually impaired primary aged pupils who may struggle at local play schemes. Parents are encouraged to support their child's mobility and independence training and are welcome to observe lessons where appropriate. A range of leaflets are available to help support work at home or in school.

Schools will also be advised of the progress of an individual child and action they can take to help. By prior arrangement in service training can be offered geared towards specific needs of individual children or schools or simply to offer an insight into visual impairment for staff or pupils.

The authority, supported by Priestley Smith School, currently employs a team of 4 RQ Habilitation Specialists. This is the equivalent of approximately 2.6 full time posts to offer mobility and independence support to visually impaired children and young people in schools across the whole of Birmingham. If after reading this booklet you have any queries or would like more information, the Team would be happy to talk to you on an informal basis.

Need this leaflet bigger?

Education Habilitation Service

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