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COVID-19 | GUIDE #3

Caring for someone over 70? You need to read this!

About our guides

This Hi-Vis UK information and guidance series is designed to help those supporting or caring for an older person who may have undetected Dual Sensory Impairment (DSI) and those already identified with DSI during this COVID-19 emergency and the guidance on social distancing and socially isolating. Our guides are also for their family, friends, neighbours, carers and care organisations, social care and health care providers.

The individual guides aim to help you quickly understand the impacts of DSI and the extra challenges brought about by the COVID-19 emergency of keeping them and you safe and still having effective communication.

Our guides cover a range of everyday situations and related challenges facing a DSI person and those who need to see them during the COVID-19 outbreak. Our third guide is for professionals providing social or health care who may not have been trained in DSI. How do you both stay safe and communicate well?

Remember: following the COVID-19 health and safety guidance is vitally important not just to keep you safe and well but to also ensure you can continue helping others. Face masks (PPE) may make it more difficult for them to understand you. Our guides include ideas about this.





THE FIRST RULE OF ANY CONTACT IS TO GO PREPARED.

If the person is known to the local adult services as having a sensory impairment, whether Health or Social Care, there should be an AIS (Accessible Information Standard) alert on their record or profile providing the person's chosen means of communication.

If not, try either contacting the person, their carer or family member, to get that information.



During COVID-19 it is essential to have this information. It will save you precious time and significantly reduce risk. It will reduce anxiety for the older person if communication is effective.



AT THE FRONT DOOR

When you arrive at the address you may find that the person is not able to hear the doorbell or knocking at the door. Try to attract their attention by knocking at the window nearest to them and moving around to try and catch their attention.



Remember:

They may not be able to see you clearly, so when possible wear brightly coloured plain clothing



COMMUNICATING

Try to have your conversation in a quiet location if possible. If this at the front door, keeping 2 metres apart might mean asking the older person to turn-off their TV or radio to minimize background noise.

Next, ensure that you are facing them with your mouth clearly visible. Speak loudly and clearly but do not shout.

REPEAT - no more than two or three attempts, if they don't understand you **REPHRASE** and try that two or three times, if that doesn't work, **WRITE** your message on A4 white paper using a large felt-tip, black marker pen.

You will know if they have understood you or not as they will be able to use their voice to answer your question. But, do not assume that a person has understood if they nod and smile as this is a common coping strategy.



Remember:

A person may have good speech which can lead to you making assumptions regarding their hearing and understanding.



LOW COST AIDS FOR DAILY INDEPENDENT LIVING

It could be possible that by supplying a few low-cost aids to daily living, the older person can develop coping strategies to keep them living independently for the foreseeable future.



Look at the list on our [COVID-19 Guide #3 website page](#) which also has information on where these can be purchased.



A HANDY TIP

If you have recognised that the older person could have DSI and may be struggling to carry out simple tasks, why not carry sealed packs containing some low cost but useful equipment for their use?

For example, a liquid level indicator and a basic magnifying glass. These will help them to make a hot drink safely and read labels on food, dials on microwaves, cookers and washing machines.



Do not forget to request an urgent visit from a ROVI or similar professional trained and qualified to assess.



AIDS AND EQUIPMENT FOR SOMEONE WITH DSI



PERSONAL AMPLIFIERS

Handy-sized portable amplifiers to help someone with DSI join in the conversation



DOORBELLS

Flashing/vibrating doorbell to alert the person with DSI that someone is at the front door. This would also avoid them having to leave their front door open because they are afraid of not hearing the doorbell/knocker.



SOFTWARE

Software to help the person with DSI see and or hear and use a computer.



LOOP SYSTEM : HOME

Loop systems for the home enable someone with DSI to watch the TV with the family – no need for the volume to be high.



SPECTACLES

Special adapted spectacles that help someone with DSI watch TV, see the subtitles on screen.



AIDS AND EQUIPMENT FOR SOMEONE WITH DSI



TACTILE MARKERS

These are small, raised plastic stickers, sometimes called bump-ons, to help someone with DSI find the settings on their cooker, microwave, radio, washer and so on.



LIFE HACKS

Such as using rubber bands to know which bottle is shampoo and which is conditioner can often make all the difference. Or attaching a large parcel label to a jar, bottle or tin with the contents written on using a bold, black marker pen. These can be reused many times. Life hacks are quick, easy and usually free to make.



FIRE AND SMOKE DETECTOR

Visual (flashing) fire and smoke detector alarms.



TELEPHONES

Large keyboard/screen and amplified handset telephones. There are flashing/vibrating phones and additional devices to convert an ordinary phone's sound to light and vibration alerting the person with DSI that their phone is ringing.



AIDS AND EQUIPMENT FOR SOMEONE WITH DSI



ALARM CLOCKS

Vibrating and flashing alarm clocks to ensure the person with DSI wakes up at the right time.



SUBTITLE OPTIONS

Subtitle options on your TV or computer/tablet/smartphone. Cinemas usually have screenings with subtitles, ask them about these.



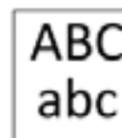
MAGNIFIERS

Magnifiers with and without a light, pocket-size or larger ones for a desk to help the person with DSI read/work. It is best to buy one that matches their spectacle prescription.



LIQUID LEVEL INDICATOR

A liquid level indicator that tells you when the hot water and then milk is near the top of the cup.



LARGE-PRINT

Large-print books, puzzles, newspapers.



TASK LIGHTS

Compact folding task lights that help you see fine detail or when doing your word puzzle book on holiday!



HEARING AID USERS

If you know that they use hearing aids, check they are wearing them – and if not, use gestures to get them to put them on. Common reasons an older person doesn't wear their hearing aids can be simple problems such as:

Batteries have run out or are running low - a quick check and replacement can make a difference.

Tubing has become blocked and kinked – you can easily replace these if the person has some in their kit.

The hearing aid needs cleaning – usually build up of wax and dirt. If it is just blocked with ear wax they can be cleaned and refitted. If necessary, check with the local Audiology Team.

A visit to the clinic may not be possible but they can send out replacement batteries and tubing in the post.

Ask the older person if they need help with these basic maintenance tasks.

Remember:

Hearing aids DO NOT correct hearing issues, they amplify all sound.

Some people choose not to use their hearing aids for various reasons.



ASSESSING IF AN OLDER PERSON MAY BE STRUGGLING WITH DSI

If it is necessary and is safe to do so – and you follow the COVID-19 social distancing guidance the following checklist will help you determine if they have DSI.

During your visit you should look out for indicators that this person has DSI, such as:

- They didn't hear or see you at their door
- They wear hearing aids and glasses
- Their TV or Radio is turned up loud
- Their chair is placed very close to the TV
- They may ask you to repeat or give wrong or surprising answers
- Is there unopened mail?
- Is their appearance or hygiene a problem?
- Unexplained injuries, bumps or falls

You can also use the questions in our simple [identification toolkit](#) which you'll find on our COVID-19 webpage.

Remember:

If you are visiting a client who is recovering from a stroke, it has likely affected their vision. This might not have been noted in their care plan.





SAFEGUARDING AND DSI

All older people are at risk of exploitation, especially at this extraordinary time. This is particularly so for those with combined hearing and sight loss - DSI.

Ensure that there are measures in place to protect.

For example:

A trusted family member managing finances - they may be happy to give a weekly cash amount to a trusted family member if it means support with shopping etc and arranging where possible for Direct Debit through the bank.

Look out for potential safeguarding issues, bruises can be caused by falls, do not assume, be alert. Sadly, at times of stress, there is evidence to suggest abuse of elders will increase.

If you have safeguarding concerns, first talk to the person. If they agree then make a referral to your local Safeguarding Team.

Scams are another example of exploitation which may make people with DSI more vulnerable.



Learn more online – it's free

Thanks to the support of the National Lottery Community Fund we are able to provide free, practical online learning to help you get the COVID-19 message across and support someone with DSI.

For further help or advice please email Jane@hi-vis.org

Visit: www.hi-visuklearning.org



If you are worried about someone:

In an emergency, please call: 999

If there is no immediate risk, call the police on: 101

