

## 8. WHAT IS MY SOCIAL NETWORK

### FAMILY

#### **a) Let's talk about ... (slide 3)**

Parents or carers of children and young people with a visual impairment contribute significantly to their upbringing and development, which forms their personality, and prepares them for life in mainstream society.

Each family is unique and has its own specific style of upbringing, which irreversibly affects the child and their personality.

Parents who accept the child's visual impairment will create natural conditions within the family home and the child's environment. This child will encounter everything that a child without a disability would. As parents focus on potential, solutions will be found to support the child to 'do' and 'learn' in a different way.

It is paramount that parents see beyond the disability, believe in their own competence, and receive the right support. If this happens, then social skills will be positively reflected into adulthood.

#### **b) Reflect (slide 4)**

- How do you support relationships between your children?
- How do siblings express their feelings about their brother/sister with VI?
- Do you talk about visual impairment in your family circle?
- How often do you engage in social events? Family/ Friends
- Do you meet other people/families (with children without a visual impairment)?
- Do you attend any support group events for children with a VI?
- Are you satisfied with support organisations for VI in your area?

### **c) Possible causes (slide 5)**

It is only natural for a parent to feel sad, shocked, worried, depressed, angry and hopeless when they discover their child has a visual impairment. Some can even feel denial with the diagnosis. These are valid feelings and must be recognised. Over time and with great determination, families can adapt to the situation and develop skills to support their child.

Some attitudes that impact on social skills are 'over-protection' and 'social stigma'.

'Over protection' - If a child with a visual impairment has an overprotective upbringing, this can lead to 'passivity' in the child and hinder their development. The consequences of this style of upbringing are particularly evident in socialization and social skills. The child will find it difficult to establish friendships/relationships with others and independence will be diminished as they rely on parents for all their needs.

We are thankful the world is becoming more aware of people with a disability but at times 'social stigma' can be a difficulty for families. Due to this, families may feel that they do not want to expose their children to negative or uneducated attitudes and the feeling of being inferior. Sadly this 'hiding away', results in less opportunities for the family and individual, a diminished experience of life and joy, which impacts greatly on self-esteem.

When the child is accepted and understood within their family/ family circle this results in opportunities to develop their personality, independence, and autonomy. Relationships can be naturally fostered, and opportunities created with grandparents and cousins allowing parents/siblings to have the time necessary for them. It can't always be about the visually impaired person, there must be a healthy balance.

### **d) Consequences (slide 6)**

If the family do not enjoy a normal family life within the family circle, there are consequences that can affect the whole family

- Low self-esteem
- Social isolation
- Depression

- Limited opportunities which impact on the future.

### **e) How to support (slide 7)**

#### **Family**

- Build positive relationships
- Spend time together and apart: activities, games to promote turn taking, going out
- Develop a rich social life for everyone!
- Meet with the wider family
- Educate the family circle how to be 'inclusive' by using audio description, modelling, and consistent when supporting opportunities for independence
- Nurture and support good relationships with sighted siblings – a common interest
- Make time for your other children and YOU!
- Engage with support groups/ attend summer schemes

#### **Specialists/Support Groups can assist parents and families by**

- promoting an 'inclusive' attitude for the child with a visual impairment.
- providing an environment in which members can be themselves, being certain that others will understand and accept them without judgement as they have similar experiences.
- providing inclusive/adapted activities for the visually impaired individual
- passing on information
- providing respite for the family
- opportunities to re-evaluate or upskill

### **f) Video (slide 8)**

### **g) Other tips (slide 9)**

Parents discuss about other possibilities