

Hearing Impairment and Visual
Impairment Support UK,
The Centre for Independent Living,
Burbank Street
Hartlepool
TS24 7 NY
United Kingdom

Email [Jane@hi-vis.org](mailto:jane@hi-vis.org)
Registered Charity Number:
1166368



COVID-19 | GUIDE #4

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 fourth guide is for anyone providing social or health care who may not have been trained in DSI. How do we increase identification of the huge number of older people with DSI currently undetected, so they can be advised, assessed and supported?



COVID-19 and Dual Sensory Impairment (DSI)

Guide No. 4

Undetected DSI: how to identify DSI

Undetected and unsupported Dual Sensory Impairment in an older person is one of our most pressing concerns as they could be struggling to understand how to follow the current government safety guidance, without the crucial help and advice they need.

Tens of thousands have already read and downloaded our ID Toolkit. COVID-19 & DSI Guide #4 helps you use our ID toolkit with confidence. It is from our online course Understanding DSI – try it, it's free: <https://hi-visuklearning.org/>

Some DSI indicators are common, some vary with location. Others are specific to the person's experience of DSI, based on the level of their hearing loss; type of sight loss; mental and physical health; mobility and reasoning abilities.

The way DSI impacts on a person can also depend on: the time of day, the light, how much background noise and the visual 'distraction' in a setting e.g. bright, bold patterned walls, large windows/mirrors, lots of people, clutter, or how safe and comfortable they feel there.

Any combination of these factors can greatly reduce the quality and ease of conversation, the ability to properly pick-up important information. COVID-19 guidance significantly adds to the communication challenge for both of you.

In older people DSI can sometimes be confused and impacted by other conditions, for example dementia, Parkinsonism, perhaps after a stroke or depression. Or a combination of conditions such as DSI and dementia. Professionals, if not properly trained and experienced in identifying and understanding DSI, seriously risk underestimating the impact it has on an older person.

In these challenging COVID-19 times it is even more important that DSI is detected. To do this everyone needs to understand DSI, what it looks like and how to communicate safely whilst staying safe – wearing face masks and social distancing.

COVID-19 and Dual Sensory Impairment (DSI)

Guide No. 4



WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR : IN THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

- Do they wear a hearing aid and glasses?
- Do they fail to respond to sounds from behind or out of sight?
- Do they miss callers – at the door/doorbell, telephone or alarms?
- Do they have the TV or radio turned up really loud?
- Do they sit very close to the TV or watch it from a strange angle?
- Do they ask you to repeat and / or give wrong or surprising answers?
- Are the lights in their home on or off at 'wrong' times of the day?
- Are there piles of unopened mail?
- Are there any signs of reading material/a marked absence of reading?
- Is there out of date food in the fridge or a lot of the same foods?
- Is their home or garden looking uncared for?
- Have they stopped communicating with friends and family?
- Are they depressed or angry and/or frustrated?
- Is their appearance a cause for concern?
- Are there obvious hygiene issues?
- Are there any unexplained injuries, scalds, bumps or falls?



WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR : IN A CARE SETTING

All of the previous DSI indicators plus:

- Is there any mention of sensory loss in their care plan?
- Are there issues taking medication, missing medication?
- Do they hog the conversation or don't wait until the other person has finished?
- Have they NOT noticed you approaching even when they are looking at you?
- Do they seem to be disorientated and have difficulty getting to their room or elsewhere where they have been to before?
- Do they sit quietly in a corner and avoid socialising with others or seem to avoid joining in with activity groups?
- Do they get up or wander around at unusual times (day or night)?
- Do they shout when they should be speaking softly and vice versa?
- Do they ask for help when shaving or putting on make-up?
- Have they left their food uneaten?
- Have they asked for a drink and then appeared to ignore it?



WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR : IN A HEALTHCARE SETTING

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT MANY PEOPLE WITH KNOWN OR UNDETECTED DSI WILL STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND A TELEPHONE OR VIDEO CONSULTATION SO ALTERNATIVE METHODS WILL NEED TO BE AGREED WITH THEM AND IMPLEMENTED.

All of the previous DSI indicators plus:

- Is there any mention of sensory loss in their patient record (Accessible Information Standard)?
- Do staff know how the patient prefers to communicate with people?
- Are they able to hear their name when called by the nurse or doctor?
- Are they able to see their name when it comes up on the LED display in the clinic or surgery?
- Are they disorientated and unable to follow signs or directions?
- Are they able to easily follow the conversation with the doctor, nurse or reception staff? Ask specific questions to establish that they have understood you. Do not accept a smile, a nod or shake of the head as proof that they have
- Have they missed previous appointments?



Think you know someone struggling with both their vision and hearing?

If, on reading our 4th Guide, you think you might know someone with undetected DSI, look at our ID Tool with its “what to do next” advice and consider how this can help you to help them.

We are here to help – If you need any help or advice from us please contact Jane@hi-vis.org

You can find our ID Toolkit here: [Download the PDF](#)

Learn about DSI: Don't forget to try our free unique awareness course online, its quick and is packed with free resources: <https://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



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Registered Charity Number: 1166368

Registered Office: The Centre For Independent Living, Burbank Street,
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