**Good Practice Guidelines for Early Intervention**

**What is Early Intervention?**

VINCYP Standard 11: There is a service within each Health Board (HB), which provides Early Intervention and family support on identification of Visual Impairment (VI).

This is defined as a service providing contact by a professional with experience in visual impairment and emotional and practical support for families, within at most 5 working days of referral. This should be available both in the community and in hospital.

Referral should be made to VI agencies in the VINCYP pathway within 4 weeks of identification of VI ([see VINCYP Care Pathway and VINCYP standards](https://www.vincyp.scot.nhs.uk/professional-resources/pathway/)).

**What do families need in terms of support after identification of VI?**

The needs of individual families vary depending on their unique circumstances. However, most families need:

* clarification of the immediate next steps after VI has been identified
* contact by a professional with experience in visual impairment who can provide emotional and practical support for families (including extended family members if required) and who can offer direct regular contact
* information about their child’s visual impairment and how this may impact upon their life - this information needs to be given by a professional who can make sense of medical terminology and make this understandable to the family
* opportunities to ask questions and to generate discussion
* to be directed to reliable information (including websites and online resources) that accurately but sensitively describes the cause and impact of the visual impairment
* practical advice and strategies for how best to support their child/young person (YP)
* information about and help to navigate the [VINCYP Care Pathway](https://www.vincyp.scot.nhs.uk/professional-resources/pathway/)
* signposting / referral to other organisations that can offer enhanced and ongoing support to the child/YP and parents/carers
* introduction to other families and support groups who have lived experience
* practical support and advice where appropriate e.g. applying for relevant benefits

**What exactly should Early Intervention involve?**

Professionals providing Early Intervention should:

* make contact with the parent/carer as soon as VI is identified
* be prepared – have some knowledge of the child/YP's visual impairment and the family situation before making contact
* provide emotional support which includes allowing time to talk, listening and answering questions
* advise appropriate early visual strategies for the child/YP
* offer regular contact
* develop a relationship with the family – understand their journey leading up the identification of VI and their concerns moving forward
* tailor support to meet the needs of the family - take the lead from the parent carer
* provide an appropriate level and amount of information
* signpost/refer to other organisations for access to the right information and support at the right time
* follow up with families to ensure they are accessing the support they need and that they have choices in what they take up
* provide practical support including help with access to benefits
* advocate on behalf of children and their families in full consultation with them
* have a multi-agency approach with good communication and regular liaison with VI professionals in other agencies to provide a joined-up service to families

**What training / experience do professionals need to provide Early Intervention?**

Professionals providing Early Intervention need:

* experience of working with families, children and young people with VI with varied backgrounds
* an understanding of the emotional impact the diagnosis has on a family
* a skill set that includes good communication, listening, attention to detail and empathy
* training inVI including:
  + the causes of VI
  + an understanding of how the condition can affect the child or YP
  + the impacts of VI on child development
* knowledge of the local [VINCYP Care Pathway](https://www.vincyp.scot.nhs.uk/professional-resources/pathway/) and the professionals/ organisations involved
* to be aware of, and signpost to, organisations that offer help and support for the parents/carers and child or YP
* experience of working collaboratively with a range of other service providers
* appropriate support for themselves - professionals may be aided by having a 'mentor'

**Which professionals are best placed to provide Early Intervention in this context?**

This will be determined by local services and may be a professional working in:

* Health - Early Intervention VI Specialist Nurse
* Education – Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI)
* Social Care (VI) / Voluntary Agency e.g. Early Intervention Support Worker

There should always be a multi-agency approach to coordinate care and ensure the best support and guidance for the child / YP and their family - it is vital that all services supporting the family are able to share information and work together.

**What are the next steps following Early Intervention?**

Ongoing support should be available for families, but this may be delivered longer-term by various professionals/organisations.