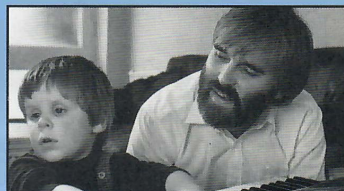


Royal National Institute for the Blind

# The world in our hands



3



Sounds  
important



**RNIB**  
challenging blindness

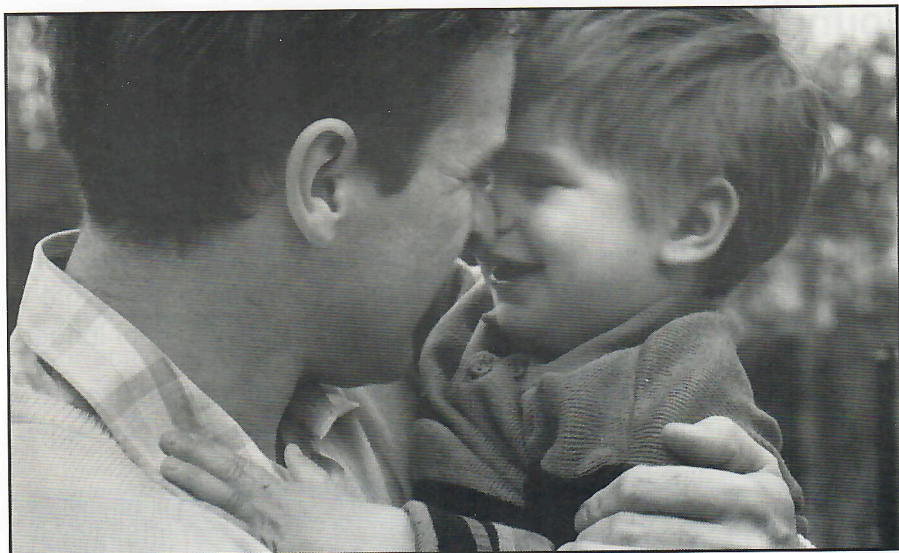
# The world in our hands

**The world in our hands** is a series of five programmes about blind babies and pre-school children. The programmes are designed for parents who have recently been told that their baby is blind, and offer support, encouragement and suggestions for what they can do to help their children lead happy, active and purposeful lives.

The first programme, **My baby is blind**, introduces a number of families who are coming to terms with the fact that their child can't see. We hear from parents about their feelings, their hopes and fears for the future, and the kind of support that they have found useful. We see blind babies and young children playing happily with their brothers, sisters and friends.

Each of the other programmes focuses on a different aspect of the children's development. Programme 2, **Moving on**, shows how blind babies learn to explore the world and how parents can help them to learn how to move around, to walk, run and jump, and to be active and enquiring.

Programme 3, **Sounds important**, shows us how, for a baby who can't see, sound is especially important as a source of information. We discover how to help children make sense of the world by linking sounds with concrete experiences, and are given ideas for extending the children's interest in sound to singing and playing instruments.



**Clap your hands, stamp your feet**, programme 4, shows how much children learn through play. The programme gives ideas for stimulating young blind children, helping them to find out how things work, what their own bodies can do, and how to play with other people.

Programme 5, **It's me!**, recaps on some aspects of the previous programmes to illustrate how visually impaired youngsters learn to communicate with others. As the children become more confident about themselves as individuals, they take more and more responsibility for feeding, drinking, dressing, washing, and organising their toys, emerging as young people with great potential for independent achievement in the future.



# Sounds important

For a baby who can't see, sound is an especially important source of information about the world around. It is hardly surprising, then, that blind babies often concentrate on sounds more intently and for longer than sighted babies of the same age.



## Listening to your voice

If you have not had experience of blind children before you may be disappointed that your baby doesn't turn towards you when you speak to him. He may even appear to be ignoring you.

He is listening, however, and is showing you this, not by turning to face you, but by keeping quite still in rapt attention.



### **Making sense of it all**

Your baby will need help in making sense of the great variety of sounds that bombard him. There are so many sounds resulting from your activities at home, and only some will affect your baby directly. You can help by linking these sounds to concrete experiences wherever possible; through feeling, smelling and tasting.



Let him get his hands in the washing-up bowl to find out what's making those splashing and chinking sounds. Let him feel the Hoover humming and the hairdrier as it wafts warm air in his face. Give your baby plenty of physical contact – let him feel what your hands are doing when you are working around the house, and let him touch your mouth and face when you are talking to him.



### **Having fun with sounds**

Your baby may well enjoy playing with things for the sake of the sounds they can make. If you include a range of noise-making objects in the toy box such as

saucepan lids, chains, rusty paper and rattly containers from the kitchen, your baby will discover that everyday objects can be just as much fun as expensive toys. In this way you can give him a wide range of experiences that are relevant and cheap! Think about the sounds you can make by banging, shaking, scraping, rubbing, twisting and squeezing. Can your baby work out how a particular sound is made? Perhaps gently guide his hand at first to help. Play games with sound. Make loud sounds and soft sounds, long sounds and short sounds; two sounds in a row, and then three sounds. Copy what your baby does, and he or she will eventually copy you.

You'll also find that the noises you make will sound different in different surroundings, depending on whether you are outside or inside, in a big room or a small room, and whether the floor is carpeted. It is possible to construct a special place, with particularly good acoustics, for your baby to play in. In the video, a parent made one such area under the work-top in her kitchen. She also used a 'resonance board', a hollow wooden board, for Thomas to sit on, which made his noisy play even louder and more stimulating. It would be worth experimenting with different play areas and materials to find out what your baby likes best.

## **Singing together**

Sing to your baby just like you would to any other – and just like parents have always done. You don't have to be a brilliant singer! There are any number of nursery rhymes, action songs and counting songs your baby or young child will enjoy. If you run out of ideas you will probably be able to find some song books in the library.

Encourage your baby to join in, and help him to do the actions. As well as enjoying the sound and the contact with you, it will help him to learn sequences of activities – to remember what happened before, and to anticipate what is going to happen next.







### **Experiencing music first-hand**

Maybe someone in the family can play an instrument. It could be the guitar or the keyboard or even the penny whistle! Share your enjoyment of music-making with your young child. If you can, show her how the instrument works, by letting her feel the different parts and find out how they move. Broaden your son or daughter's musical experiences as much as possible, by listening together to a range of music, and by giving her the opportunity to hear other people playing at first hand, if possible. Perhaps a neighbour plays the saxophone? Maybe you could go out, as a family, to experience some live music. Have you heard the organ in the local church or the folk-singers in the pub across the road? What about the brass band that plays in the park on Sundays?

## **Tapes and the radio**

It will give both you and your child a great deal of pleasure if you build up a collection of tapes or CDs. There is a range of recorded music you can borrow or buy: Indian music, African music, Chinese music, early music, modern music, jazz, reggae – not to mention pop! Be selective in what you listen to on the radio, and tell your young child what he or she is hearing. Talk about it. Find out whether she likes some sorts of music more than others. Your child may want to join in by playing along with her favourite beat. A much loved tape may well be a comfort at bedtime, or help to enliven a long car journey.



## **Music and other children**

Music can be a very good way of getting to know other people – it's a great medium for socialising. If your blind child goes into a room with more than three or four people, it may be hard for her to

work out who is there. But by singing a song that introduces children by name at toddler group, for instance, you can let your son or daughter know who's in the room.

Through music your child can be brought closer to other children, joining in together or taking it in turns to listen to what they are doing. This turn-taking, which may be structured in the form of a song, will help your child get to grips with the complicated give and take of everyday conversation.



### **Learning an instrument**

With all this attention to sound, it is little wonder that a high proportion of blind children develop musical senses earlier, and more fully, than many sighted children. So don't be surprised if your son or daughter learns to sing in tune before his or her friends of the same age can. Blind children often take an early interest in playing an instrument too. Anything is possible, although a piano or keyboard (which is a cheaper option and usually comes with headphones!) can be especially good to start with, since all the notes are laid out for the children to feel, and they will be able to play chords as well as tunes. Keyboards often have many different sounds and pre-set rhythms too which offer youngsters a rich source of musical experience.



## Music lessons

If your child does show any particular musical interest or ability, by picking out tunes on the keyboard, for example, do start lessons as soon as possible. It is never too early to get the basics sorted out. Teachers often advertise in local music shops and papers, or you may know of another child who is already having lessons. The most important thing at this stage is that music should be fun, so it is worth trying one or two sessions first to see how they go. If the teacher you choose is uncertain about how to start, he or she should contact the RNIB Music Education Advisory Service.

To begin with, lessons may well comprise a mixture of physical guidance and teaching by ear. Lessons can be taped so that the child has a record of what has happened, and can listen between times, perhaps playing along – the beginning of practice. Reading music and writing it down, which is possible in braille, usually comes at a later stage. For now, you could stick braille note names on the keyboard, for example, and label some of the buttons, which in itself may be an incentive for starting to read!





### **Technology**

Apart from a keyboard, your child may well enjoy experimenting with other items of music-related technology such as tape recorders, radios and CD players. Children usually love discovering how these things work and take great delight in being able to control them. As with the keyboard, put labels on buttons and switches where possible, using different textures or braille. This will give a further degree of independence to your child that will contribute to her growing feeling of confidence in her own abilities.

The RNIB Music Advisory Service can be contacted at the National Education Centre 081-968 8600.

# Royal National Institute for the Blind

RNIB aims to improve the quality of life for visually impaired people. **RNIB National Education Centre**, based in West London, provides support for teachers, parents and others involved in the education of blind and partially sighted children. Other RNIB centres cover the North of England, the Midlands, the South West, London, Wales and Scotland. They form part of the **Education Support Services** network which offers a range of services including:

- **Information and advice** about the needs of visually impaired children, their parents and professionals. This is available through our Education Centres and also from our national Education Information Service.  
Contact:           Manager, Education Information Service  
071-388 1266
- **An advocacy service.** This offers support to parents and helps to ensure that their views are taken into account in decisions about schools and other aspects of their child's education.  
Contact:           Family Liaison Officer           0905-357635  
or                   24 hour hot line:                   0676-41429
- **Technology services.** A large exhibition of technology used by visually impaired children is on display at the RNIB National Education Centre in London in addition to smaller displays at RNIB Education Centres throughout the country. We offer advice, assessment of individual children's needs, training and an equipment loan scheme.  
Contact:           Technology Officer                   081-968 8600



- **Family weekends** for families with visually impaired children where parents gain information while their children are cared for.  
 Contact: Family Support Officer 0222-668606  
 or one of these regional offices:  
 Midlands Family Liaison Officer 0905-357635  
 North Family Support Officer 0532-450508  
 Wales Family Support Officer 0222-668606  
 London & South East  
    Family Liaison Officer 081-968 8600  
 South West Education Field Officer 0647-24326  
 Scotland Education Field Officer 031-313 1876
- **Integration support** to help blind and partially sighted children to participate fully in mainstream schools.  
 Contact: Education Field Officer 0532-450508
- **A music advisory service** offering advice on music education for visually impaired children, their parents and professionals.  
 Contact: Music Education Advisor 081-986 8600
- **Training.** We offer long and short courses for parents, teachers and other professionals involved in the education of visually impaired children. Contact your regional education centre for details of courses available in your area.

For further details, please contact:

**Education Information Service**

RNIB Education & Leisure  
 224 Great Portland Street  
 London W1N 6AA

071-388 1266

**RNIB National Education Centre**

Garrow House  
 190 Kensal Road  
 London W10 5BT

081-968 8600

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Dorton House School, Sevenoaks

*Dorton House School is run by the Royal London Society for the Blind which has been providing education for blind and partially sighted children since 1838. The School, located near Sevenoaks in Kent, is one of the main education centres for visually impaired children in the south east.*

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