



Chapter 13

Becoming Part of the Community

Children who cannot see well are part of the community, just like all children. But too often children who cannot see are kept at home. They seldom play outside, or walk, or help with their family's work. These children have little chance to get to know other people, and other people do not get to know them. People may even think that blind children cannot learn how to do things. When children who cannot see go out into the community, people may be unsure how to talk to them, or how to act.



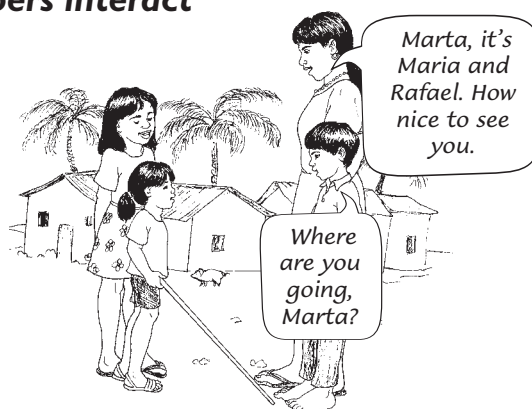
As parents, you can do a lot to help your child become an active member of the community. Take your child with you as much as possible — when you collect water, or gather wood, or when you go to the market, or to school, religious services, and community meetings and events. Along the way, describe what you see and encourage her to listen to sounds, and to touch and smell things. Introduce her to the people and animals you meet, and teach her how to greet people.

How community members can help

Community members can learn that a child who cannot see well is just as active as other children. But she also needs special help getting to know people and finding her way about. People may feel uncomfortable with your child until you explain how to act.

► To help community members interact with your child

Encourage them to speak to your child whenever they see her. Ask them to introduce themselves and to call your child by name, so she knows they are talking to her. Explain that they should speak directly to her, rather than asking other people about her.



Encourage people to help your child find what she is looking for. Community members can learn to give directions (see pages 111 to 113) that will help her find things on her own.



Encourage people to answer your child's questions and to explain things to her. As members of the community get to know your child, they will begin to realize that she can do more than they would ever have thought possible!



How other children can help

Children can be cruel to a child who cannot see well. They may be cruel by teasing, laughing, imitating, or even hurting her. But more often they are cruel simply by leaving her out of their games or activities.

► To help children understand what it is like to be blind

Often children act in a cruel way because they fear what they do not understand. When they gain more understanding, children can become another child's helper or friend. Here are some games that may help children understand blindness:

Game: Blurred vision

Children can find out what it is like not to see well if they:



put on somebody's strong eyeglasses or a pair of scratched sun glasses



cover their eyes with a piece of thin paper or other material that allows them to see just a little

To see these letters I have to get this close. And they're still hard to see!

Then have the children try to see something with small details, like the pattern on a leaf or the letters on a tin can. Ask the children what it feels like to try to see these things. How close do they have to get to see well?



Game: Guiding a blind child

Have children get into pairs. Tie a cloth around one child's eyes, so she cannot see at all. Let the other child be her guide. The guide takes the 'blind' person for a walk, lets her feel different things, and helps her move safely.



After the game, encourage the children to talk about these questions:

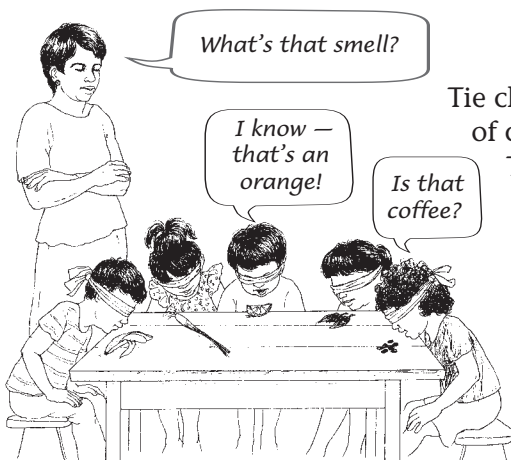
- How did it feel not to be able to see?
- Were you afraid?
- What did your guide do that was helpful or not helpful?
- What might he have done better?
- Did you trust your guide?

Game: Feel a friend

Tie a cloth around one child's eyes so she cannot see at all. Then let her try to recognize her friends by feeling them. Or she can try to recognize different objects. Then talk together about what it was like not to be able to see.



Game: What's that smell?

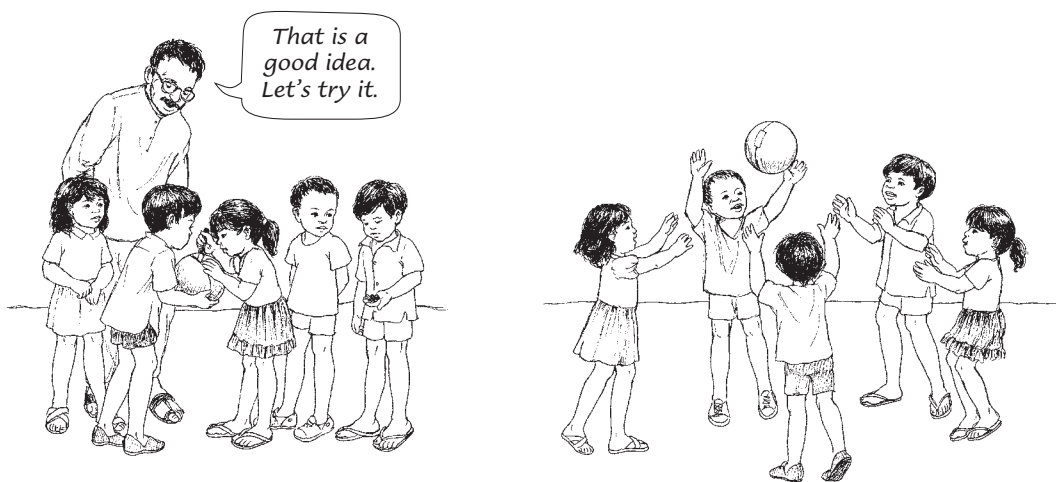
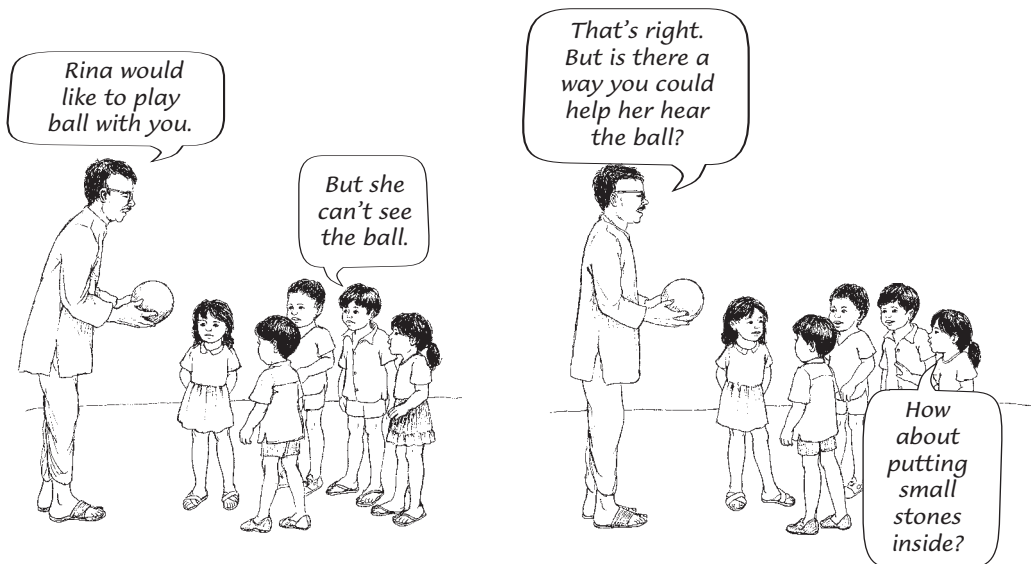


Tie cloths around the eyes of a group of children, so they cannot see at all. Then put in front of each child something with a strong smell like a peeled orange, tea leaves, coffee beans, a banana, or local plants. See if the children can recognize these things by their smell.

After the children play these games, explain to them that because blind people cannot see, their sense of touch, smell, and taste usually gets very strong.

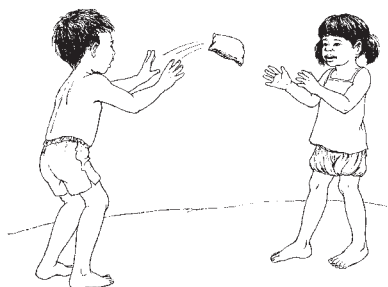
► **To help children include a child who cannot see well in their games**

Often children do not realize that a child who cannot see well can play with them if they make small changes in their games. For example:



When she could hear the ball, Rina could join in the game.

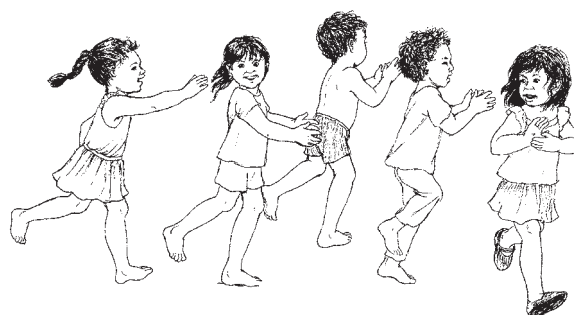
Here are some more suggestions for including a child who cannot see well:



A bag filled with beans or rice can be used instead of a ball in a game of toss. The bag will make a sound when it is thrown and when it lands. Or try playing 'catch' by rolling a ball along the ground. A child can hear the ball as it rolls and catch it.

If a child can see bright colors, use brightly colored cloth for the bag.

A child who cannot see well can join a game of tag if the other children clap their hands or whistle as they run, or have something tied on each of them that makes noise.



A child who cannot see well can learn to jump rope if there is a bell tied to the rope.



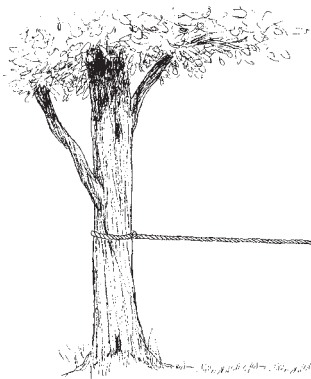
A young child can use a can for a drum, a rattle made from a can with stones in it, or bottle caps strung on a wire to make different kinds of music (see page 185).



Drawing pictures in wet sand or mud helps a child feel what she draws.



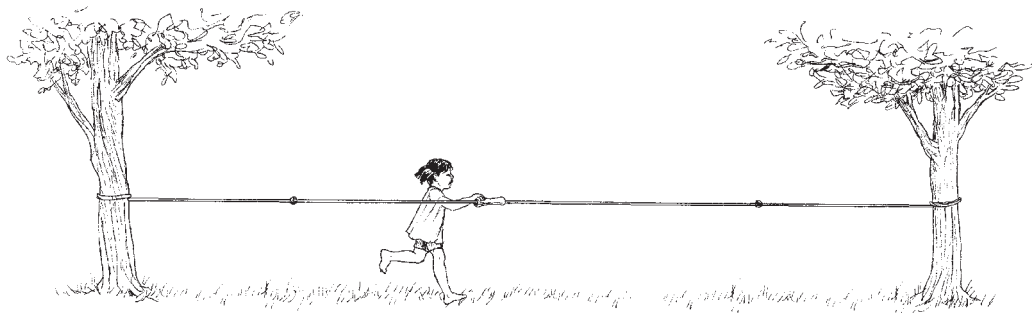
A child who cannot see well can run races by using a rope tied between 2 trees, like this:



Tie one end of a rope around a tree. Then tie a big knot in the rope, 1 to 2 meters (3 to 6 feet) from the tree.



Put the end of the rope through a hollow tube, like bamboo.



Tie another big knot 1 to 2 meters from the second tree. Then tie the rope around the tree. Be sure the tube cannot go past the knots.

For more ideas, ask the children in your community. See who can come up with the most ideas of how to include a child who cannot see well in the games children play.

Community projects

Building a playground is an activity that can help children and community members learn to work together. There are some simple things that make play areas fun for all children. Then children who cannot see well will not feel left out. The ideas suggested here will be enjoyed by all the children in the community.



BUILDING A PLAYGROUND

To build a playground, it is best to use local, low-cost materials and simple construction. The playground will give children and parents a chance to try different playthings. Whatever works for their child, a family can later build at home, at no or low cost. For this reason, a playground made of tree limbs and poles, old tires, and other 'waste' materials is better than a fancy, expensive, metal playground built at high cost.

A Playground For All

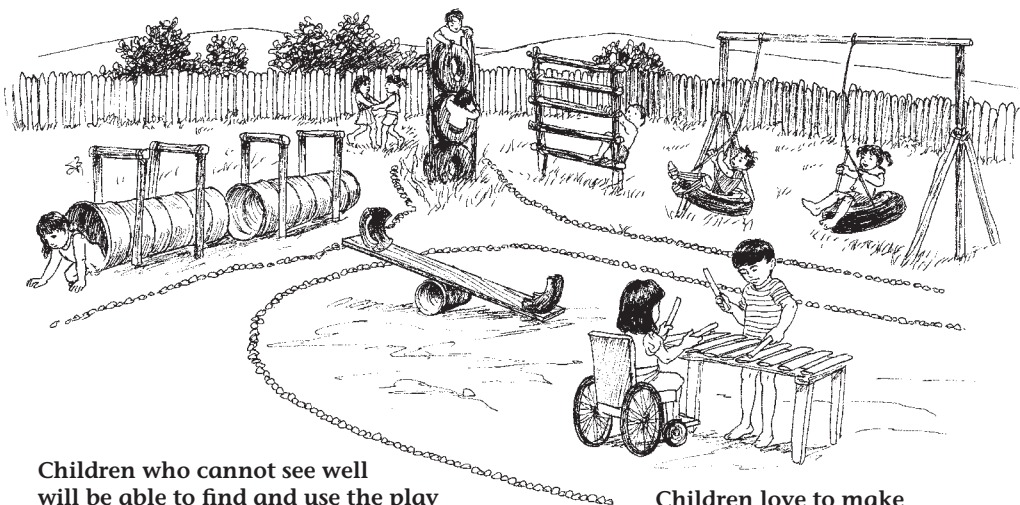
Ribaralta is an isolated town in Bolivia. Because of bad roads, it takes 30 hours to drive from Ribaralta to the closest city. It is a poor town. There is no water system, and many of the people who live in Ribaralta do not have electricity. A group of parents of children with disabilities had begun meeting every 2 weeks. They discovered that they had become experts about their children's needs.

Because they had learned so much about disability, they wanted to educate the community about children with disabilities. They decided to build a 'playground for all children' that would bring disabled children and non-disabled children together through play.

The parents' original idea, which they thought would take 3 Sundays of work, became a much bigger project as people began to think of more ideas for the playground. They got businesses and farms to donate bricks, nails, wood, and trees. The finished playground included a fence, benches, trees, and playground equipment made from local wood and used tires.

Children enjoy crawling through well-cleaned old barrels or drums. Children who are blind will enjoy the echoes their voices can make inside the drums.

Try to include different kinds of swings. Build some swings low enough for small children to reach by themselves.



Children who cannot see well will be able to find and use the play equipment if it is painted with bright colors. Children who are blind will be able to find their way around if paths have edges, and if some play areas have grass and some have no grass.

Children love to make sounds by hitting or tapping things. Children who are blind will especially enjoy this kind of play.

Playground suggestions

- Involve as many people in the community as possible in building and maintaining the playground. The playground must be cleaned and repaired regularly, and this will require planning and organization.
- Keep the playground simple and build it from local, low-cost materials. This way, people can copy the ideas and build equipment for their child in their own homes.
- For poles that are put into the ground, use a kind of wood that does not rot quickly. Paint the part that will be underground with old motor oil, tar, or other insect- and fungus-resistant substances.
- Swings can be hung from ropes or chains. Ropes are cheaper but may rot or wear through quickly. Plastic or nylon rope will not rot in the rain but it will grow brittle and weak in the sun.
- Check the strength of poles and ropes frequently by having several heavy people pull on them at one time. Replace the ropes when they first start to weaken.
- Make sure that children are included in the playground design, construction, and maintenance. Much of the work can be done by children with adults to guide them.