Tips and tricks for parents, or grandparents, living with sight loss

These tips and tricks have been given by other parents living with sight loss.

# Feeding / Weaning

* I found spoons with a little tiny lip would make it easier to feed my daughter things like porridge or Rusk in milk. The spoons I found also had some flex in them. I think they were from Home Bargains so I didn’t need to break the bank by searching for some overpriced accessible types. You can also get bowls with suction cups on the bottom. I found these really helpful as well.
* We followed baby led weaning so didn’t need to worry about spoon feeding. This worked with all of our children.
* My main tips were breast feeding and baby led weaning for food.
* I found breastfeeding much easier than making bottles up, it can be hard in the early days but look for support, there are lots of organisations that can offer help with this. Though know that there is no right or wrong on this issue, bottle feeding means others can feed baby too.

# Reading stories / books

* One thing that really used to make me sad when my daughter was born was knowing that I wouldn’t be able to read books to her. Books has always been a constant throughout my life, despite being totally blind. But I came across Living Paintings, a range of books with pictures on one side and Braille text on the other. My daughter is now five and we love reading story books together.
* I used Clear Vision books and the Living Paintings Trust books.
* Digital library services are amazing for reading with your kids. Audio books to pause and chat about the books if you have no vision or the ebooks are really adjustable with colour and font size for those with some vision.
* It’s nice that me and my mum and other family members can share some of the reading. I think it makes reading a whole lot, more fun and engaging for my daughter.
* Sometimes when it’s bedtime, and I’ve already read books to her, I just type in ‘story books for children’ into YouTube or ‘audiobooks for children’. There is a vast range of books you can play to your little one. I leave VoiceOver on but switch off speech and make sure the screen curtain is off. This encourages my daughters, listening skills and comprehension.

# Potty Training

* when potty training my daughter, I found it was much easier to put my child straight on the toilet without bothering with the potty stage. It only took her a couple of days to get used to the toilet. I just found the whole poty experience not very accessible and time-consuming. I recommend parents skip the potty stage.
* Potty training was another thing I was constantly being told how to do! It didn’t work for my daughter, and I eventually bought a seat that sat on top of the ordinary toilet and my daughter quickly picked up the idea that she needed to sit on the toilet for a wee or poo and it worked best for us.

# Home Life

* The biggest tip for me being a clean freak was that mess doesn’t matter; get one of them play trays and get the slime out, get the sand out, get the water out and don’t worry.
* When my daughter sat in her highchair and ate her food, I just used to put newspaper down under the chair so it would be easier to clean up if food fell onto the floor. This saved hours of scrambling on my hands and knees looking for big bits of food, then having to get the vacuum out each time my daughter was feeding.
* Being super organised with groceries, having a place for everything and everything in its place so that you don’t get caught out with stuff getting pushed to the back of the fridge and being forgotten.
* I never worried about mess! My living room was a glorified playroom!

# Getting Out

* We had a pull along buggy and then when they were toddlers, we put little bells on them, so it was easier to keep track at the park and playgroup.
* I also LOVED baby carrying and using those little backpacks with a lead on them.
* Find smaller local mother and toddler groups so they’re more personal and people help you out more.
* When she did start walking, I used squeaky shoes and later put bells on her shoes so I knew if she was up to mischief!!! When we stopped using the pushchairs, I used a wrist strap I found this much easier and efficient for my daughter. I always talk to her about the dangers of the road and why we stood at the curb before crossing and she quickly picked up these things.
* I used to pull my pushchair in fact I had two pushchairs. Both of these had been adapted specifically for my needs by Remap. They were both lightweight and easy to fold and bright coloured! I used more often than not a bright pink pushchair with roses on! Our pavements are narrow here and I needed to be sure that I was seen and soon became quite a well-known sight in our small market town.

# Baking

* I loved baking and there’s now so many food activities that require no measuring (I hate them talking scales). We both love the kinds of things that require no measuring, weighing or precision.
* Buy pizza bases and random toppings you can just throw on.
* Get a ready-made cake you can decorate by just throwing what you want on,
* Get baking trays you can pour microwave melted chocolate all over and add berries and whatever you fancy, then throw it in the fridge I just used cheap oven trays that you cook things like chips on or I’ve got silicon ones now. Anything goes though. I can literally use anything that will just allow a layer of chocolate to set. We have used berries, raisins, biscuit bits, sweeties, sprinkles, nuts, mixed white and dark chocolate so she can draw swirls, anything you like that’s in the cupboard. Put the chocolate in then sprinkle stuff or place it over. Pop it in the fridge or freezer then break it up and munch. We’ve used yoghurt instead of chocolate before too.

# Feelings and Mindset

* I’ve learnt that I need space to talk - so having counselling once a week really helped me.
* One thing I found difficult was a degree of loneliness. Other parents were a lot younger than I am and was somewhat intimidated by this I think! Most mothers knew each other from various places and schools all of which I had no experience of in my hometown having gone to boarding school. I would make friends more often with the organisers of groups but, always made sure I spoke to everybody and in some ways pushed myself forward rather than hold back.
* I think you need to make sure you don’t get into the mindset that you’re the only one dealing with the problems your having. Reach out to support groups, they’re incredibly helpful and give you a better sense of perspective.

# Doing things your way

* Advice from others is always good however, it can put you in an uncomfortable position and create problems. Everyone told me I should have a bedtime routine and that my daughter should be in bed by 7 pm. There was no way that this was going to work with my daughter! The more I tried to do what I had been told the harder it became. Eventually I told myself to do things the way I think best and the result was both my daughter and I had a better nights sleep!
* I did hundreds of things with my daughter, but I did it my way rather than ways I was always being suggested to do. I now have a beautiful 14-year-old whom, has grown into a very bright independent young woman and I am very proud of her. We still get told how to do things and we still do things our way...
* I am totally blind single parent, and I am a guide dog user!!! The biggest thing that I learnt very quickly during my pregnancy was to be clear, precise and positive about how I wanted things. Many people had lots of good ideas and suggestions. In fact, I was over advised and I quickly learnt not to listen and do things the way that suited me best. With my total blindness I have other impairments such as osteoarthritis so bending and similar activities were difficult. So, I found ways of doing things that would suit me as a whole. For example, I always changed my baby while she laid on the bed and I could kneel on the floor. Not recommended by health visitors but I had a very good open minded health visitor who used to say “if it suits you, that’s the right way to do it “.

# Benefits of having a VI parent

* My daughter learnt to talk quicker than she learnt to walk. I believe this is because I constantly talked to her and described what we were doing how we were doing things and why.
* I’ve found that sensory walks are fab with my little 5 year old. With me being blind, her awareness of her surroundings is greater than others her age and her descriptions of what she sees to inform me are like poetry
* For me, I would say that I used to feel sorry for my son having a mum who couldn’t drive but when I look back (my son is now 16) I think we really got to know our local area and found lots was available, he didn’t miss out and I actually think he has gained a perspective that having a disability doesn’t mean you can’t do things.

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