# Operational Policy: Simulated Vision Loss (NAG 5)

## Blind & Low Vision Education Network NZ

## Statement of Intent:

The Blind & Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) is committed to ensuring that simulated vision loss is used appropriately in terms of providing insight to the sighted community of the challenges of blindness and the techniques that can be used to attain independence. It is noted however, that simulated vision loss on its own does not give a fully accurate simulation of different types of vision loss, or that it will necessarily help people understand the impact of social attitudes and living in a world that is not well adapted to the needs of people who are blind, low vision or deafblind.

Careful consideration needs to be given to the appropriateness of the use of the simulated vision loss strategy with any individual or group. Staff should seek advice from their line manager prior to undertaking such activities.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the “Simulated Vision Loss Procedures” and must be adhered to.

## Definitions:

### Simulated Vision Loss

The use of any prop or technique which simulates partial or total blindness. This includes the use of blindfolds and simulation goggles or glasses.

### Blindness Awareness

Educating the public about the work (and services) of BLENNZ and the needs and contributions of ākonga who are blind or have low vision.

### Media

Includes radio, television, newspapers, internet and other publicly available media.

## Policy Requirements:

1. Staff who employ simulated vision loss techniques must:

* Have a recognised educational qualification in Blindness Education and/or experience; or
* Be able to demonstrate their competence through prior learning/experience; or
* Be undertaking a programme of learning that is supervised by a trainer who has competence.

2. Simulated vision loss is a strategy that may be used, after consideration, for:

* Staff and volunteer professional development;
* Inservice courses for professionals working with ākonga in schools and early childhood facilities.

3. The inline manager must be consulted prior to simulated vision loss strategy being suggested to ākonga and their whānau.

4. After careful consideration simulated vision loss techniques could be used:

* To simulate tasks e.g. adaptive daily living, travel, negotiating buildings;
* To train people in the use of techniques for supporting blind, low vision and deafblind ākonga e.g. sighted guide;
* To equalise participants during sporting events e.g. goal ball
* As part of an individualised and agreed upon DOM specialist programme.

5. Simulated vision loss techniques may not be used at events where the media are present unless prior approval has been received from the Board of Trustees through the Principal.

6. Photographs, videos and other recordings of people employing simulated vision loss techniques must not be used for publicity purposes.

## Supporting Documents:

Approved: 

Date: 1 October 2023

Next Review: 2026

# Simulated Vision Loss Procedures

## Simulation activities

BLENNZ staff may offer blindfold activities to other educators or trainee professionals in an attempt to get them to understand what it is like to be blind. Though this “blindness simulation” can trigger empathy toward blind people, it can also mislead people about blindness, giving an inaccurate impression of blindness and reinforcing misconceptions about the capacities of blind people. Therefore any blindness or low vision simulated activity needs to be carefully considered and managed.

Prior to putting a professional (or professional in training) under blindfold, ensure you alert the trainees to the following guidelines:

* Putting blindfolds on is the closest way we have to try to understand some of the practices and adaptations that may support a person who is blind, however it in no way replicates how a person who is blind feels.
* Unless it is a course requirement in respect to professional study, the activity is optional: any person can withdraw at any time if needed.
* Participants are experiencing this as a sighted person suddenly and temporarily devoid of vision. This may lead to participants feeling insecure, frightened, withdrawn, frustrated, incompetent, anxious, distressed, lonely, fearful, helpless, or confused during this activity. It is important to recognise that this is *NOT* how a blind person feels.
* If you don’t ‘peek’ during this activity, you will find that everything is in blackness. This is not how most people who are blind see. This may in fact range from detecting light from dark, to seeing large objects, to seeing everything, but blurry.
* Blindfold simulations can be misleading. An individual can remove the blindfold at any time whereas someone with a permanent vision loss cannot.

When carrying out blindfolded experiences:

* Invite a person who is blind to assist with the activity, whenever possible. This will have a more positive impact than when delivered by a sighted person.
* Ensure the activities lead to mastery of blindness skills and confidence, rather than frustration and anxiety.
* Allow enough time within the simulation activities for repetition and practice, leading to skill mastery.

When carrying out low-vision simulation activities through the use of low-vision simulation glasses, follow the same principles.

* Invite a person who has low vision to assist with the activity, whenever possible.
* Ensure the activities lead to mastery of low-vision skills and confidence, rather than frustration and anxiety.
* Allow enough time within the simulation activities for repetition and practice, leading to skill mastery.

## Ākonga and classmates

BLENNZ staff need to be cautious about using blindness simulations to educate ākonga classmates about blindness. A better way to foster understanding and promote friendships when working with ākonga classmates is through a presentation that:

* Promotes respect for the ākonga who is blind or low vision.
* Demonstrates the tools that the ākonga will be using.
* Invites guest speakers who are blind to address the class.
* Guides the class and their teachers through skills or strategies.
* Involves the participation of the ākonga who is blind in educating peers.

## Parents and whānau of children who are blind

Great caution needs to be taken when considering asking a parent of a child who is blind or low vision to participate in a simulation activitiy. Depending on many factors, a blindfold activity could be emotionally traumatic for a parent. In addition the exercises could give parents an inaccurate perspective on blindness. For parents of infants who are congenitally blind, simulations can be expecially misleading as it is not possible for a sighted person to accurately simulate the experience of someone who has never had sight, especially a young infant.

It is more helpful for parents to meet adults and older students who are blind and observe how they perform tasks.

If simulation activities are going to be with parents or whānau of children who are blind, low vision or deafblind, the principles listed above apply.