

Choosing a Cell Phone While Low Vision or Blind

First ask yourself, what do I want to be able to do with my phone? Many low vision or blind users just want something to make calls or send texts on the go. Others want to surf the web or use ride share apps.

Second, ask yourself, “how many new things am I willing to learn?” With great features can come great complexity. Also, keep in mind that the price can become greater too!

- **Level 1 - Keep it Simple.**

If you just want an accessible cell phone that can make a call or send a text, the MiniVision 2+ doesn't get much simpler.

Accessibility highlights: Tactile buttons that are large & high contrast. Fully vocalized operation. Some voice command capability (requires Wi-fi or data plan). Similar physical & menu structure to a flip phone for those who are already familiar.

Notable Limitations: Small screen. Only operates for basic uses of calls, texts, voicemails, daily features like alarms, and some low vision features such as a money identifier.

Price: \$329

- **Level 2 - Middle of the Road**

While it can be complex in features, but not in use, the BlindShell Classic 2 is a great way to have a lot of common apps & uses of a smartphone without having to deal with a touchscreen.

Accessibility highlights: Large, high contrast screen. Large print. Tactile buttons. Fully vocalized operation. Vocal commands (requires Wi-fi or data plan).

Notable Limitations: Not every app is available to download like you would see on a smartphone, because of this no ride share apps are currently available.

Price: \$529

- **Level 2.5 – Smart Phone Features in Tactile Devices**

SmartVision3:

- If you want a smart phone, but what is holding you back is difficulty managing the screen reader gestures, SmartVision 3 may be the one for you.
- **Accessibility highlights:** Tactile buttons that are large & high contrast. Fully vocalized operation. Dictation. AI assistant for vocal commands (Google Assistant). Similar physical structure to a flip phone for those who are already familiar. You can still use touch screen if preferred.
- **Notable Limitations:** Best for screen reader users, not for Low Vision accessibility features listed above in Android section. Only runs on Android operating system, which currently will not have updates.

Price: \$599 for Standard Package

BlindShell Classic 3:

- If you want more power and app access with a touchscreen, the BlindShell Classic 3 brings smart features in a simple, tactile format.
- **Accessibility highlights:** Tactile buttons, high-contrast screen, fully vocalized operation, voice commands, and access to a growing BlindShell App Catalog (includes Aira, Be My Eyes, WhatsApp, etc.) as well as the Android app catalog, however
- **Notable Limitations:** Not all apps in the Android Google Play app store are usable with the phone, even if you can download them. Screen is the same size as the BlindShell Classic 2, and has not been increased in size for low vision users relying on large visuals.

Price: \$690

• **Level 3 - Knows No Bounds**

Smartphones seem inaccessible out of the box, but almost all have features built in you can enable to make it usable with any visual impairment. So why is this considered the most challenging of the 3 options? Learning how to enable & use these features takes practice and aren't always intuitive. If you are choosing this route, put the limitations into consideration before purchase and make sure to ask your representative if the phone has the particular feature you need. There are two different types of smartphones, therefore consider below to be a comparison of both types.

• **iPhone**

- **Accessibility highlights:** Best screen reader. Great assistant (Siri) for vocal commands. Auto speaker. Magnification. Talking caller ID. Large print. Dark theme/color inversion. Dictation. Talking keyboard. High contrast font. Selective screen reading.
- **Notable Limitations:** Section Reading of Selective Reading feature is fairly visual. Magnification gesture & operation can be difficult for some (usually those with hand/wrist conditions).
- **Price:** Steeper compared to Android but varies. Please discuss with your service provider.

• **Android**

- **Accessibility highlights:** Best magnification. *Best selective screen reading. Dark theme/color inversion. *AI assistant for vocal commands (Google Assistant). Dictation. *Large print. *Talking keyboard. *Talking Caller ID. *Auto Speaker.
- **Notable Limitations:** All Androids are different & may require some installation of accessibility features (most commonly missing feature that can be installed is the selective screen reading). Some Androids lack a feature entirely, such as the hands-free Google Assistant which makes this operation more difficult for those who can't see the screen at all.

- **Price: Varies, discuss with your service provider. Less expensive than an iPhone.**

*** = may require installation or not available on every Android phone.**