

Childcare and Blindness

For a child who is blind, there are many challenges faced when entering new environments for the first time. A childcare centre is an exciting place with many fun things to do, but for a child who is blind initially they may be cautious and hesitant to explore and discover all the fun opportunities.

How does a child who is blind play? What toys do they play with?

Initially, a child who is blind may not spontaneously play in a new environment where the toys are unfamiliar. The child needs to be shown where the toys are kept and given lots of time to explore the toys.

A child who is blind may not play with a toy the same way as a sighted child, but it is important that the child explore toys by themselves. It is often tempting to help him or her play with the toy by guiding their hands. When an adult places their hands over the child's hand to help him or her play, the child will often withdraw their hand. This is because the child who is blind uses their hands to explore, manipulate, learn and understand about the world and don't like being shown how to do this. A young child who is blind may also use their mouth to explore and gain information about new toys.

When a child who is blind drops an object or toy, they will often search to find it by listening for the sound when it drops and locating it.

Children who are blind love to play as all children do. They play with noisy toys, musical toys, blocks, everyday items (such as plates, spoons, cups, containers with lids, etc.), blocks, push a long toys, shape posters, water play - the list goes on. Where possible it is important that toys are kept in the same place, so that as the child becomes familiar with the environment, they are able to find the toys independently

What about mealtimes?

Mealtimes can be a messy time for all young children, and children who are blind are no exception!

At mealtimes, it is best that the child sits at a table and chair. Let the child feel for the table and chair and encourage him/her to sit. Initially, you need to tell the child where the plate, cup and utensils are located. In some cases you may need to help the child find these by tapping the item on the table as you tell them where it is.

Always try to keep the items in the same place so that the child can become independent in finding the items on the table.

With finger feeding, tell the child what and where the food is. The child may initially explore the food to learn about its size, shape and texture. If the child is having difficulty with picking the food up, you may need to assist.



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When using a spoon, make sure that the bowl is located close to the child to minimise any spillage. If the child has difficulty bringing the spoon to his/her mouth, you may need to assist by gently guiding the child's hand.

With drinking from a cup, fill the cup to half way to minimise the chance of spillage. Initially when the child is learning this skill, try to use the same type of cup, i.e. with or without a handle, so that the child understands how it is to be used.

What about toileting?

For a child who is toilet trained, you need to show the child where the toilet is located. Allow them to explore the toilet area, remembering that the child needs time to explore an unfamiliar setting.

Also, discuss the child's toileting routine with the parents. This way you can try to maintain the routine and use the same language the parents are using.

The child should be encouraged to pull pants down and up, or assist as necessary. The child may require assistance with wiping. If so, guide the child's hand from front to back.

And finally...safety

Children who are blind are all different and some will be keen to explore their environment, others will prefer to stay still until they are sure

of where they are. Try to keep the environment the same for the first few visits but this doesn't mean you have to have the same toys. Just try to keep the areas for play/self-care in the same place such as the home corner, the tables for meal times, toy shelving etc. The same place to put their bag and to sit for meals may help too. This will help the child build up a map of the room and encourage their independence. If you need to move things make sure you tell the child and even take them for a tour!

All children have falls and bumps and children with vision impairment are no different. Reminding other children that their peer can't see them riding their bike straight for them and the child who is blind to listen for the oncoming bike will avoid some collisions but not all- this is normal!

Also, most children who are blind will have access to professionals such as an orientation and mobility instructor who can help with safety.

Don't forget about the child's parents or caregivers!

Parents and caregivers are generally more than happy to provide Childcare with information on strategies that they already use at home – so don't be afraid to ask if you need some advice on their child's unique needs.

For more information contact the Children and Youth Services team at VisAbility.



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