

# Childcare and Vision Impairment

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

## Talking to a Child with VI

When talking to a child with VI, it is important that their name is said first, so that you can gain the child's attention and that he knows you are talking to him.

Explain to the child what activity is going to happen next. For example at mealtimes, you need to explain that it's time to sit at the table because it's lunch time and this is where we sit. This helps the child become familiar with the daily routine.

Also describe objects in terms of their size, shape, weight etc. - understanding some of these concepts can be difficult as the child may not see them as sighted children would. Also describe new, unfamiliar objects (indoors and outdoors) to the child as well.

## Inform other children in care about the child's VI to create a mindful environment

Give the facts – name of the child's VI and how it affects how the child sees. Let the children know what you want from them. If you want them to understand how to interact with a child

with VI, ask them to talk to the child and explain what they are doing. For example rolling a ball with a bell in it towards the child

## How Does a Child with VI Play?

Initially, a child with VI 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 with VI 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 hand over the child's hand to help him or her play, the child will often withdraw their hand. This is because the child with a vision impairment uses their hands to explore, manipulate, learn and understand about the world and don't like being shown how to do this. A child with a vision impairment may hold the toy up close to his eyes or turn his head in a funny way. Don't discourage this as he is probably doing it in order to see well.

## Toys and Books

Children with VI 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



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becomes familiar with the environment, they are able to find the toys independently.

When choosing toys and books look for:

Contrast- Toys with good contrast have colours such as black and white, navy and yellow etc.

Colour - Bright colours are far better than pastel ones.

Size - Larger toys may be easier to see than small ones.

Background - Try and present toys on a plain background without too much clutter. Children with vision impairment often have trouble picking out objects from a busy background. Books with 1 picture per page are often easier to see.

## Mealtime

At mealtimes, it is best that the child sits at a table and chair. It can be helpful to use a placemat that contrasts with the colour of the bowl/plate (e.g. navy placemat and white bowl) and a bowl colour that contrasts with the food. 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. Don't assume that the child can see it. The child may initially explore the food to learn about its size, shape, colour and texture. If the child is having difficulty with picking the food up, you may need to assist.

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.

## 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.

## 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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