



Play and the Child with Visual Impairment

- Make every attempt to keep the environment the way your child is used to having it. Toys and equipment should be kept out of the walking space and brought forward as your child is ready to play with them.
- Allow your child ample time to hold and manipulate materials. He or she may want to explore the entire toy before beginning to play.
- Use as many toys with auditory cues, vibrations and noises as possible.
- Do not hesitate to use the words "look" and "see."
- Enrich your child's world by using words to describe what he or she is doing, what is happening, and the smells and sounds around you.
- Introduce new ideas by talking about the ideas your child already knows and understands, for instance, clouds look like cotton feels.
- Feel comfortable touching your child and allowing your child to touch you.
- Encourage your child to explore and move around. Help your child to take part in large movement activities to give him a sense of his body in space.
- Talk to caregivers, teachers and family members about how the child uses his or her body and where to place toys so the child can readily access them.
- Be safety aware: avoid objects with sharp edges, parts that stick out in unexpected ways, and small pieces that can be easily swallowed or lost.
- Avoid activities that have a high risk of failure or that are very intense.
- Choose activities that can be completed or an obvious stopping place after a short period time so that your child will not end the activity with a feeling of being interrupted.
- Provide toys that your child can play with again and again without too much thought. This can be a calming activity which fulfills the need for the child to have control, predictability and sensory input.
- Choose sturdy toys that will not fall apart easily.
- Provide toys that your child can use without your help.
- Arrange an area next to your child's bed that contains some familiar, well-liked toys as well as some new toys to discover.

Enriching the Sensory World of Children with Visual Impairment

If your child has visual impairment, almost everything learned come from the use of other senses (touch, taste, smell, hear). The child with a visual impairment must have new experiences just as sighted children do; therefore, any real and "true to life" toys can help the child learn about the environment around them. Your child can learn about real life experiences through toys such as a miniature boat to float in the water, or a cook set with which your child can actually mix, cook, taste, and smell what is being prepared.

There are many ways to enrich the sensory world of a child with visual impairment and to increase her ability to learn and have fun. In general, to help children explore their world, we must move them through the actions of daily life and talk about the actions at the same time. Sit behind your child as you demonstrate a movement. At first, put your hands through your child's hands and move them together. Show your child how to handle each new toy. As your child learns the skill, give less and less help. Describe objects and answer questions, but avoid asking questions that put pressure on your child. Encourage family members, friends and caretakers to play with your child in the same ways. Demonstrate how it helps to sit behind your child and work hand-over-hand first.

Listening and Hearing

Your child's hearing can be stimulated in a variety of ways. Let the child know when you are nearby by saying your name and touching the child to make contact. With an infant, you might shake a noisemaker, ring a bell, whistle, or hum. At first, touch the baby's cheek to make sure the baby's head is turned toward you. Encourage your baby to listen while you run your fingers across a comb and use appliances. Other good noisemakers are pie tins, pan lids, spoons and paper towel tubes. Talk with your baby about the new sounds and encourage the baby to copy the sounds you make.

How Does It Feel?

Use touch to give your child as much information as possible. Fill a box with different kinds of cloth, such as velvet, silk and terry cloth. Describe the different textures. A box of paper also makes a good toy. Babies can tear, crinkle and throw magazines, phone books, wrapping paper and cellophane.

Bath time can become learning time with the addition of a sponge, spoon, strainer, ice, warm water, or a cup. Some of the same toys could be used in a tub full of textures such as beans, foam packing "peanuts," macaroni, or cloth pieces.

Be aware of the physical characteristics of the objects in your child's world. Provide variety and be aware of how your child responds to them. Give your child exciting materials after a nap and soothing materials before bed. Consider toys that will provide the sensations of vibration and temperature as well as texture.

MMM Good

Expose your child to a variety of smells, such as cedar, vanilla, flowers, pine, mentholated salves, and cooking extracts. At home, the smells can be put in clothes drawers or on sheets. Each room can have its own smell.

Let's Move

To stimulate a child's sense of movement, dance while holding a baby, or tie a string to a toy or rattle and let the child pull it. A child with visual impairment cannot see the relationships behind these concepts. Show the relationships first with the child's body, then between the child and an object, and finally between two objects.



Play and the Child with Visual Impairment...*(continued)*

Having a visual impairment does not mean that a child cannot ride a tricycle or ride on toy. Include horns or bells, anything that will make the tricycle more exciting and fun. Of course, make sure that the environment is safe and free of obstacles.

Play With Me

Toys and games can be adapted. Many games such as cards and bingo can be marked in Braille for the Braille reader.

Most of all, remember when choosing toys for your child that every child, sighted or not, is a different individual. The majority of toys that are made for sighted children can also be enjoyed by children with visual impairment if they are given the chance to learn how to use them and are actually shown (hands on) how these toys are to be played with appropriately. It may take more time and more guidance from you, as parents, to teach them, but the investment will result in greater independence for your child.

The following lists of toys was compiled based on the experiences of professionals and parents, or were found in various publications. This list is by no means complete. Your child's developmental age and the extent of visual impairment should be considered.

- **Musical and Noise Making Toys:** Rattles, See 'n Say, push-pull toys (boats, trucks, cars), music boxes, toy instruments (drums, tambourine, harmonica, etc.) tape recorder, record player
- **Toys With Feeling:** Mobiles, busy boxes, squeeze toys with sound and color, floating water toys, cuddly toys, balls of all kinds, figures like Stretch Armstrong that can be pulled and twisted but will return to its original shape, Slinky
- **Fine Motor Toys:** Stacking disks, peg boards, beads to string, puzzles, form boards, shape sorting boards, busy gyms
- **Riding and Outdoor Toys:** Wagon, tricycle, rocking horse, slide and swing set, swimming pool, sand box
- **Imaginative and Creative Play Toys:** Cook sets, telephone, tool sets, dolls and puppets, activity sets, flannel board with shapes, numbers and letters, magnetic sets
- **Books:** Many books are now available that feature textures and/or moving parts such as the classic *Pat the Bunny* by Dorothy Kunhardt. Talking story books have strings to pull or buttons to push so the child can listen to each page.

Adapted from articles by Kelly Marts, LEEP Network News, January 1993 and Libby McAleb, Children's Specialist with the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Arkansas.



Play and the Child with Low Vision

- Bubble blowing: Pop the bubbles with a pointed finger or by clapping hands. Add a few drops of glycerin to the mixture to make the bubbles stronger and more colorful.
- Ball games: For the young baby, roll the ball. Drawing faces on balls or balloons with a felt tip pen adds to the fun. For the older baby, place a ball in the foot of a pair of tights and hang up for the child to bat.
- Shine a flashlight on a wall in the dark and get someone else to catch your beam in theirs.
- Riding a tricycle: Include horns, bells, or anything that will make the tricycle more exciting and fun. Make a riding trail with brightly colored tape.
- Clear plastic tubing (found in hardware stores) can be used as a marble course.
- Visit the airport to watch the planes taking off and landing.
- Go to see a fireworks display or make shapes in the air with sparklers.
- Go to the park and feed the ducks. Fly a kite.
- Play with puppets. Play peek-a-boo. Watch a friend swing. Watch fish in a bowl.
- Line up toy cars and race them along the hallway.
- Use bright, bold colors in your child's world.
- Adapt toys and games by enhancing pictures and words with thick markers.

Adapted from the Toy Library Federation of New Zealand Newsletter, November 1991.

Books for Children

Seedlings...Braille Books for Children To order a catalog, call 800-777-8552 or www.seedlings.org

- Print-Braille-and-Picture books are picture books generally for preschoolers with Braille added on clear plastic. These books are a good introduction to Braille for your young children.
- Print-and-Braille books for beginning readers are double-spaced with added printed words just above each Braille line. Blind and sighted children can enjoy these books together.
- "Braille only" books are for more independent readers.

The National Braille Press has a print-and-Braille book club for children and a book for parents who want to learn some Braille. "Just Enough to Know Better" is a fun workbook for sighted parents of children who are learning to read Braille. To order, call 617-266-6160 or www.nbp.org.

Sense-Able Braille Books is a nonprofit organization that offers a book of the month club. To receive their catalog in print or Braille (specify), write to PO Box 333-S, Ludington, MI 49431-0333 or (617) 266-6160



Publications for Parents of Children with Low Vision or Blindness

Guide to Toys for Children Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

www.afb.org

Toy Industry Foundation (TIF™), in partnership with Alliance for Technology Access (ATA) and American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), has researched and tested hundreds of toys, and the end result — a comprehensive guide of the best toys for children with all types of special needs, of all ages, with different interests kept in mind. Toys in the guide were tested by over 100 "toy experts," children with a variety of special needs at a number of testing centers all over the country. The toys featured in this Guide were selected by individuals from these two organizations based on the toy's play value for children with special needs.

The Early Intervention Dictionary, Jeanine G. Coleman, MEd.

From the Heart: On Being the Mother of a Child with a Disability, Jayne DB Marsh and Carol Boggis, eds.

The Language of Toys, Sue Schwartz, PhD and Joan Miller, EdD.

Uncommon Fathers: Reflections on Raising a Child with a Disability, Donald J. Meyer, ed.

Tot Sock Hop, Barbara D. Trube, MEd, plus audiotape.

The Bibliography Series is an extensive listing of materials organized into areas of interest such as "Children with Blindness or Visual Impairment". The Series is available to anyone by contacting The Illinois Early Childhood Intervention Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse also provides access to the listed materials for Illinois residents only and may be requested by mail, phone, fax or in person to South Spring Street, Springfield, IL 62704, 800-852-4302 (V/TTY), 217-522-4655, fax 217-522-4670 or www.eicclearinghouse.org.



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