



This handout is designed to assist parents and caregivers of a child with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI). The information in this handout has been adapted from our DVD called *Cortical Visual Impairment in Young Children*. CVI is the most frequent cause of sight difficulties in young children, and it can prove puzzling at first. But with a little help and encouragement, most children with CVI can develop better seeing skills as they grow. We hope that the answers to these common questions will help you as you explore the world of sight with your child.

### What's The Best Time To Perform Visual Activities With My Child?

- Some children have a consistent time of day when they are most visually aware and able to take advantage of visual stimulation. Try to use these times to provide visual activities for your child.
- Watch your child closely for signs when he or she is feeling best. Visual attention will decline if your child is feeling tired, ill, or bothered. Try to wait for a better time when they can give their full attention to visual activities.

### How Often Should I Perform Visual Activities With My Child?

- Usually, children respond best to short periods, about 5 -10 minutes of visual activities spaced throughout the day. This will allow them to process information without becoming bored or tired.

Watch your child for signs that he or she is happy and not frustrated with the activity.

### What Position Should My Child Be In When Performing Visual Activities?

- You should make sure your child is in a comfortable position. The more energy they have to spend maintaining their position, the less energy they will have to concentrate on the visual activity.
- Children who have not yet gained control of their body or head should be supported, usually in an upright position with the head in midline.
- Some children show more visual awareness when lying on their side or back. If your child is like this, just make sure that your child is comfortable and not using too much effort to stay in position.

### What's The First Visual Activity I Should Try With My Child?

- Children often respond first to bright light. You can try introducing your child to a bright light source such as a flashlight, a brightly lit toy, or Christmas lights. Avoid halogen lights – they're very bright, generate a lot of heat, and are damaging to the eyes.
- Try to find ways to make the light visually interesting for your child. Other light sources in the room should be less stimulating so they are not competing with the one you're using – turn other lights down or face your child away from them.

Try turning your bright light source on and off, or moving it slowly when your child shows interest in it.

### Is It A Problem If My Child Stares At Strong Lights?

- Many children enjoy staring at lights because they're such a powerful source of visual input. It's not necessarily a problem, unless it's distracting them from some other activity you're trying to do. You can always change the child's position away from the light source.
- Remember that it's dangerous for your child to look directly at the sun. This could damage his or her eyes. Face your child away from direct sunlight, or close the coverings on the windows.

### Can I Use Toys To Help My Child See?

- If your child's vision is more than light perception, then you can use a toy to help develop visual skills.
- Try to use a toy that's easy to see:
  - Simple shapes between 4 -10 inches may be easier for your child to see.
  - The primary colours red and yellow can be easier to see than pastel colours.
  - Shiny, sparkly, light-reflective toys are often a good choice.
- Try to use the toy in ways that will help your child see it:
  - Hold the toy where your child's vision is best, to attract attention. At first, closer is better.
  - Move the object slowly from side to side.

- Above all, take your time and don't rush. If your child becomes visually disinterested, wait for a better time.

### What Other Kinds Of Objects Can I Use For Visual Activities?

- Try to provide objects your child is familiar with, such as a cup, milk bottle or a favourite toy.
- Often a very familiar object such as your face or the family pet will prove more interesting than any toy.

### How Many Objects Should I Use With My Child?

- Children with CVI find it easier to process simpler information. Try to provide your child with only one object at a time.
- If you are using more than one object, try to keep them spaced well apart to avoid visual clutter, and always try to use the same object with the same activity, so your child will not become confused.

### Should I Use Moving Or Stationary Objects?

- Some children with CVI tend to see moving objects better. Others tend to see things better when they remain still. Through trial and error, you should soon find out which approach suits your child the best.

## Is Colour Contrast Important?

- Contrast can help your child see objects more clearly. Because children with CVI often have trouble separating foreground from background, they have an easier time if toys are placed on a plain-coloured background in a contrasting colour. For example, you can place a yellow duck on a plain navy blanket, or a black bear against your white shirt.

## How Can I Use My Child's Other Senses To Help With Sight?

- Children with CVI may become confused with too much sensory information at one time and others may need more sensory information to be drawn visually to the object. You should hold objects close enough for your child to touch them, and use toys that rattle or squeak.

## Can I Teach My Child How Different Objects Relate To Each Other?

- In time, many children with CVI can learn to bang objects together, place them in containers, or stack them on top of each other. It will take patience at first, as depth perception problems are common. You may find that you have to place your hands over your child's and guide them until your child has mastered the activity on his or her own.

## How Can I Learn More About Visual Activities For My Child?

- To purchase a copy of the Visual Impairment Program's DVD, "Cortical Visual Impairment in Young Children," or to borrow other lending materials, please contact Sunny Hill's Education Resource Centre. For more information about visual development and vision services, please call the Visual Impairment Program at Sunny Hill and ask for a Vision Consultant.

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