

# Visual Impairment

## What is a visual impairment?

- A visual impairment is the decreased ability to see to a degree that it causes problems that cannot be fixed by usual means, including glasses or medication
- There is a large range of visual impairments and every child needs different adaptations.
- This damage is lifelong and irreversible
- Children who have low vision may need optical devices (e.g., special glasses), modified materials (e.g., large print), or environmental modifications (e.g., contrast or spacing of print)

## Developmental Differences

Vision is a very motivating sense in typically developing children. The ability to see objects encourages children to reach for items and to sit up to observe the environment. Children with a visual impairment typically experience delays in motor skills such as head, neck, and trunk support because the visual motivation typically developing children have is not present for them. Because development follows a linear path, these initial delays in milestones can lead to other developmental delays.

## What language differences you can expect to see

- Lack of exploration – children with visual impairment may be fearful of the unknown or caregivers may be overprotective.
- Delayed babbling and in 1-2 word combinations
- Reduced opportunities – children with visual impairment have less access to large print books, tactile books, braille, equipment needed to read (e.g., closed circuit televisions), and they are given less opportunities to scribble or write.
- Children with visual impairment cannot perceive facial expressions and nonverbal communication to guide interactions and may have difficulty interacting with peers.



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**For more information, visit:**

Environmental Adaptations in the Preschool Classroom

<http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/environmental-adaptations-preschool-classrooms-serving-children-who-are-blind-or-visually-impaired>

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## What can be done to help?

### Encourage Exploration

- Encourage children to explore their environment through touch - spread toys out
- Encourage initiative-taking
- Encourage play with real-world toys, such as doorknobs and plastic bowls

### Give Rich Language

- Provide concrete examples
- Give rich descriptions while children are exploring
- Give explicit instructions for playing with toys and peers
- Talk about mental states, such as feelings, beliefs, and thoughts
- Expand on the child's utterances and ask questions to encourage inferences and predictions

### Encourage Reading

- Provide opportunities to interact with print and braille at an early age.
- Use tactile books
- Use repeated reading to develop reading fluency and comprehension
- Provide large print materials and adequate lighting

## Classroom Modifications

The following are modifications that can be made in order to help a visually impaired child be successful in the classroom:

- Seat the child near the front of the room
- Ensure the room lighting is adequate
- Provide large print materials (when necessary)
- Help ensure the child is using assistive devices such as eyeglasses or magnifiers



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