

VI Times

Volume 3, Issue 4

MN Regions 5 & 7 Vision - O&M Staff
Barb Lhotka, Editor



Vision-O&M Staff

The purpose of a newsletter is to provide specialized information to parents and teachers of students with vision impairments. We hope to send regular newsletters that will cover topics of interest that are informative and create a base of knowledge that will assist our students with their on-going success!

Contents

Vision-O&M Staff	1
Early Childhood	1
Language Development	2
Social Interaction	2
Self-Help Skills	2
Independent Movement	3
Fine Motor & Hand Skills	3
Cognitive Skills	3
Resources for Families Of Young Children	4

**Contact your
Teacher for the Blind
/ Visually Impaired or
Certified Orientation
& Mobility Specialist
if:**

- You have further questions on the newsletter topic
- Would prefer the newsletter in electronic format by email or in print.

Benton-Stearns Ed District

Amy Ormerod, TBVI, O&M

Buffalo District #877

Diane Grundyson, O&M

Glen Hoppe, TBVI

Elk River

Molly Ouellette, TBVI, O&M

Pam Schumacher, TBVI, O&M

Freshwater

Diane Grundyson, O&M

Nicole Schmidt, TBVI

Little Falls

Diane Grundyson, O&M

Beth Lehn, TBVI

MAWSECO

Liz Karels, TBVI, O&M

Midstate

Diane Grundyson, O&M

Beth Lehn, TBVI

Paul Bunyan

Louise Flickinger, TBVI

Diane Grundyson, TBVI, O&M

Rum River

Lois Jacobson, TBVI, O&M

Tracy Shimer, TBVI

Sherburne-Northern Wright

Michele Lawlor, TBVI

St Cloud

Doreen Bohm, TBVI, O&M

Marissa Mahowald, TBVI

St Croix Ed District (SCRED)

Cindy Bruning, TBVI

West Central

Diane Grundyson, O&M

Glen Hoppe, TBVI

Early Childhood

Young children with vision impairments should have an evaluation and the needed services of a licensed teacher of the visually impaired and an orientation and mobility specialist as early as possible in their lives. The way a child with a vision impairment learns about his or her world is different than the way his or her sighted peers experience it. There is more purposeful structure needed for the child with a vision impairment to put the pieces of the environment and learning together.

Think about how frequently we touch and move babies and young children. With a child with a vision impairment, when things "just happen" and then "disappear" the child will not develop a sense of permanence or the ability to control what happens around him or her. The child must learn routines, what to expect, and how to participate, as part of the process. Without vision, there are limited ways of learning how things work, what others do, and how to make things happen!

Family support will help make this happen through the IFSP.



Language Development

Most children with a vision impairment will not show an actual delay in language development during the first months when they are learning to babble and imitate words and phrases. They do, however, have more difficulty with language development once words in their world take on meaning and are related to objects, people, events and tasks. When the child cannot see what is happening, the meaning remains abstract. It is difficult for the child to use pronouns (not certain what is about themselves and others) and they may find it difficult to describe and tell about objects. Some children

repeat what they hear others saying (echolalia) but without real meaning in the actual situation. There are other children with vision impairments who will be able to use full sentences that fit the topic, but they have no idea what they are really talking about (lack the experience) and are using vocabulary they have learned only on a verbal level.

Our job is to provide young children with concrete hands-on experiences that will connect with the associated language. Labels for objects must be connected to the real object whenever possible.

Social Interaction

Children generally learn to play with others through visual observation. Imitation of the parent or peers' actions will form the basis for the child's interaction and play. The child whose vision is impaired needs to have interactions, play, use of toys, and concept development purposefully taught.

The area for play should be arranged, structured and defined so the child can locate toys that "get away" and knows where he or she is safe. Toys should be easy to get to, easy to operate, and not be too plentiful as to overwhelm. Repetition and success with toys and games will encourage your child to practice and become more independent.

Self-Help Skills

Another area that must be very purposefully presented include the self-help skills of eating, dressing, grooming, etc. Your child should be responsible for the same things in self-care as any other child. It may take longer to master, but it is very important that children with vision impairments understand how to take care of themselves and their own needs in preparation for growing up!

There are lists of skills available from your TVI or COMS that will help you to know which skills should be taught at what age. Start with simple tasks and praise every effort. Remember your child will not be able to observe when they have completed a task correctly, so teach them to look for cues given by touch to check for accuracy.

Independent Movement

Many young children with vision impairments develop their locomotor skills later than sighted children. The tendency for the child with vision impairment to stay as anchored to the ground as possible lasts a little longer (about 6 months) without intervention. It is important for the safe environment of the home to support movement and exploration at all ages. The child also needs to be motivated to reach out beyond arms length and explore what is around him or her. Children do not automatically substitute hearing for the missing vision, hearing is a sense that must also be developed. There are no color, contrast, light changes, etc. to encourage movement, so the environment must be adjusted to provide other cues and rewards for interacting with the world!

Position in space and understanding that there is a world outside of the length of reach must be taught. Routine movements with a parent or sibling around the house can help the child understand the relationship of walking or moving from one place to another. Distance and time are factors in good movement and travel.

The gross motor skills that need to be worked on and developed include:

- crawling / creeping
- walking
- running
- twisting
- stretching
- marching
- jumping
- hopping
- rolling
- climbing

Your child also needs to learn to follow directions, play simple games with you and then with others, know when to stop playing.

Fine Motor & Hand Skills

Your child's hands will be his or her eyes in many situations throughout his or her life. It essential that hand skills be taught.

Fine motor skills often develop rather slowly for children with impaired vision. They don't have visual observation to guide them in imitation of your movements or a sibling's. It may be that your child will be hesitant to touch and grasp things that aren't familiar or of a particular texture or consistency. When this is the case, it means that everyday hand use for tasks such as holding a spoon or exploring with the hands will be delayed. We want to work with those skills as early as possible. It is not a good idea to force your child to use his or her hands, but presenting experiences with touch in a safe and fun manner will reduce the resistance and assist your child in feeling good about touching things.

Finger games, blocks, clay, bead stringing, etc. will help build hand skills. Presenting textures in isolation will not provide a good learning experience. The textures should be part of a game or an activity and presented in a play or learning context.

Cognitive Skills

Learning about your world is a complex task for any child. Your child needs to learn that things in the environment don't just disappear when they are out of reach (object permanence) and that he or she can make things happen (cause and effect). He or she will also need to learn all the concepts that make the world make sense: up / down, etc. Your child will also need to learn to sort objects, categorize objects, identify objects using characteristics, sequence information, remember what has been said and repeat...and much, much more!

Resources for Families of Young Children

Topic Preview

Future issues of this newsletter will address:

- Parenting
- Self-Determination & Advocacy
- Sensory Efficiency
- Social Skills

Past Topics

- Introduction to BVI
- Cortical Vision Impairment
- Living Skills
- Low Vision
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orientation & Mobility
- Recreation & Leisure
- Transition
- Braille
- Technology
- Early Childhood Intervention

American Foundation for the Blind
www.afb.org

Blind Babies Foundation
<http://blindbabies.com/>

Braille Institute
www.brailleinstitute.org

Foundation for Blind Children
<http://seeitourway.org>

Lighthouse International
www.lighthouse.org

Minnesota Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (MNAPVI)
www.MNAPVI.org

National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI)
www.spedex.com/napvi/

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
www.loc.gov/nls/

Perkins School for the Blind
<http://www.perkins.org/resources/scout/>

Prevent Blindness America
www.preventblindness.org

Seedlings
2 free braille books per year
<http://www.seedlings.org/special.php>

Toys R Us
accessible toy list put out each year
<http://www.toysrus.com/shop/index.jsp?categoryId=3261680>

WonderBaby
www.wonderbaby.org

****Your Teacher for the Visually Impaired & your Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist are great resources, too!**