



Gathering Medical History and Preparation for a Doctor's Visit/Medical and Clinical Perspectives

When your child is first seen by a new eye doctor, you can expect the doctor or a member of the staff to ask about your family's history of visual impairment and about your child's birth history or when you first noticed changes in your child's visual behaviors.

Trying to prepare for the visit ahead of time may help. Try to schedule the appointment at a time that is good for your child's schedule. Writing down a list of your questions and concerns can be useful in getting the information you need. If your child is seen by a Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TBVI) ask them for a report to share with the doctor about visual behaviors at home or school

It is sometimes helpful to bring a favorite toy, or to have a bottle or pacifier on hand. These may help your child feel safer and it is hoped, reduce his or her stress level. It may help you to bring another family member, friend, or your TBVI with you to help ask questions..

*"Always remember that it is not your fault. There are a lot of services and doctors out there to help. You are not alone. Stay positive. Talk to other parents and compare experiences."
Jeremy, father of Jayden*

Who Conducts the Exam?

An appointment with the Pediatric Ophthalmologist can be the most important

decision you make to help you understand the nature of your child's eye condition. If your area does not have a Pediatric Ophthalmologist, than a general Ophthalmologist may be necessary or may assist you in the referral to a Pediatric specialist. An Ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who makes a diagnosis, performs surgery, and treats eye diseases. This professional checks the health of the eyes and tests for visual acuity and visual field, prescribes glasses and medication.

Another important specialist to see your child may be an Optometrist. An Optometrist prescribes glasses, low vision aids (magnifiers) and teaches patients how to use them. The Optometrist is typically seen after the Ophthalmologist. Additionally, an important professional for your child to see is a Pediatric Low Vision Optometrist. An Optometrist can help you understand your child's eye condition, inform the parents how much vision your child has and how to maximize the use of his/her functional vision. .

Upon Exam:

During an exam, an eye doctor may check and measure a number of aspects of your child's vision. These may include the health of the eyes, visual acuity, visual fields, refraction and sometimes eye pressure depending on your child's eye condition.

When parents take their child to an eye doctor, whether an ophthalmologist or optometrist, the experience can be stressful. Here are some helpful hints to ease the tension:

- What is the priority for today's visit?

- What are the next steps? By the end of the visit, you should have a basic idea of what the future will bring. Your doctor will not usually answer to “exactly” what future vision will be, but what to watch for and generally what the next few years will hold.

Medical Language

It's important that you let the doctor be the diagnostician and make his or her own assessment. Remember that every profession has its own specialized language and abbreviations, and medicine is no exception. Please refer to our network website and the resources listed to further guide you:

www.birthtofivevision.org

The Pediatric Ophthalmologist's Perspective by

Dr. Mark Borchert, M.D.

After receiving the news that your infant was born with a visual impairment, it is natural to ask the question "why did this happen to my baby?" While research continues to respond to this question, it is critical that you understand: **It is not your fault.** As a Pediatric Neuro-Ophthalmologist, I would encourage you to seek out a Pediatric Ophthalmologist in your community that is familiar with your child's condition, so that you may learn more about the nature of their impairment. Let the physician direct the history that he or she obtains about your child, but be sure to add any additional information that you think may be important at the end.

Access early intervention services in your community and build a team of early intervention specialists who understand your concerns, help you to better understand your child's needs, and suggest ideas to encourage their development.

Play with your child, and experience the joy of discovering their strengths, as well as those areas that may need more support. Share your observations, and your primary questions with your child's physicians and early intervention team, yet understand that many of your questions may not have direct answers. Time and patience may be the only way to predict the answers you seek. From my perspective, knowing that the wisdom you gain in realizing that you are your child's best advocate will be your most valuable tool in meeting the challenges ahead.

The Developmental Optometrist's Perspective

by Dr. Bill Takeshita, O.D.

“Is there anything that can be done?” This is the most common question asked by parents of children with vision impairment. The answer to this question is “Yes!” The first 5-years of life are the most critical years for the development of a child, including the development of vision. Many children with low vision are delayed in making eye contact, reaching for toys, crawling, or even talking. Fortunately, with the assistance of a team of professionals, many children with low vision make excellent developmental gains.

The first step for parents is to create a team of experts who can help the child with reduced vision. First, the child should have a complete ophthalmologic eye examination by a pediatric ophthalmologist who specializes in the specific condition of the child. It is not sufficient to have the child seen by a general pediatric ophthalmologist. The ophthalmologist may recommend surgery, medications, or other treatments that can improve the vision of the child. Next, the child should be examined by a pediatric low vision



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optometrist or ophthalmologist, preferably one who understands vision development. These doctors can perform special tests to determine how well the child is able to see, regardless of whether the child is able to tell you what they see. By understanding what the child is able to see, parents and therapists will be able to help the child much more effectively as the child grows and develops. There is much that we can do together to ensure that you have the knowledge and resources to maximize your child's development

RESOURCES

Blind Babies Foundation, Oakland, California
94612, 510-446-2229, www.blindbabies.org

Family Connect, www.familyconnect.org

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RESOURCES

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Dr. Mark Borchert, M.D. Associate Professor of Ophthalmology and Neurology, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Director, The Vision Center, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, University of Southern California.

Dr. Bill Takeshita, O.D., F.A.A.O., F.C.O.V.D., Director of Children's Services, Center for the Partially Sighted, www.low-vision.org



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