



Raising a Child with Visual Impairment

"Raising a child with a Visual Impairment; Myths and Realities"

Myth

I have done something wrong

Reality

"It's not your fault" Dr. Mark Borchert, Neuro-Ophthalmologist, The Vision Center at Children's Hospital Los Angeles tells the family members of his patients. Children are diagnosed with different types and severity of visual impairment every day and no one is to blame.

Reassurance:

It is natural to wonder what might have caused your baby's vision loss. In some cases, the cause of visual impairment is not known. Other diagnoses may be made more easily. It is natural to want to find a definitive cause for a diagnosis and even to have feelings of guilt. Moving beyond these difficult feelings toward acceptance is a positive message for your child. Together you will learn all the things that can be done to accommodate for a visual impairment.

Myth

It is not fair to burden other people with my feelings and concerns about my child and no one can understand how it feels.

Reality

You are not alone in how you feel. Finding sources of support can positively impact your quality of life and help you find others with similar experiences.

Reassurance:

Finding other parents, or family members, who can relate to the ups and downs and everyday issues involved in raising a child with visual impairment can be very reassuring. There are websites for parents where you can post questions. There may be parent support groups in your area or a professional you know may be able to put you in touch with another parent. You may feel hesitant or nervous at the thought of discussing such personal information, but most parents find that it relieves tremendous stress to share stories with others who have similar real life experiences.

Myth

If my baby does not make eye contact or see me, he or she must not know who I am.

Reality

Your baby or child will know you by your voice, your touch, your smell and the many unique interactions you have together.

Reassurance:

Watch carefully for the cues that indicate your child is “greeting” you: opening eyes wide, changes in breathing, getting still or being more active. This body language is a powerful form of communication that should be encouraged and rewarded with your touch and your words.

Myth

My child is vulnerable and needs more protection than a sighted child.

Reality

Your child with a visual impairment will need as many opportunities to explore and experience the world as any other child.

Reassurance:

Letting your visually impaired child freely explore their surroundings will mean more bumps and bruises for them and more anxiety for you. You will need to be creative in how you structure learning opportunities and always make sure the environment is safe. The result, however, is your child becoming an independent, curious, resourceful and confident young person and adult.

Myth

My child's other senses will be sharper to compensate for their visual impairment

Reality

A child who is blind or visually impaired uses

his/her senses more effectively and with more awareness out of necessity.

Reassurance:

Purposeful, hands-on experiences, real-life objects, tactile information, sensory input and daily routines form the basis of learning for children who do not have functional vision as well as those with some degree of remaining vision.

Myth

Learning depends solely on vision.

Reality

Babies who are blind or visually impaired learn and develop skills in all developmental areas just like their sighted peers.

Reassurance:

Children with visual impairment may be able to learn to use their remaining vision more effectively by taking advantage of everyday opportunities to practice visual skills. The theory is that by performing activities that require visual attention, fixation, perception, etc. within daily routines, the visual areas of the brain are stimulated to maximize the development of vision. Children who are blind learn from special strategies that support a child's development through familiar voices, sounds and favorite toys or objects. These strategies can encourage a child to lift their head, reach out in space and explore their environment through repetition and routine activities that promote language as well as safe, successful exploration.

Myth

I need to become an expert in visual impairment to most effectively help my child.



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birthtofivevision.org

Reality

You are your child's best and most natural teacher. Professionals will play an important role but the bond between caregiver and child is the most critical for growth and development.

Reassurance:

Your home environment is the most important and familiar "classroom" for your baby. Here are some suggestions on how to maximize your baby's early learning and visual development at home:

~Talk to your baby so he/she knows when you enter a room. Encourage your baby to find your face or voice and reward him or her with a kiss or hug.

~Moderate or bright lighting and contrasting colors and backgrounds may make it easier for your baby to use their vision. Colored tape around a bottle or cup, goldfish in a black bowl, masking tape along a dark carpet and proper lighting will help encourage visual learning.

~Provide a consistent predictable routine to your baby's day like a good morning song, sharing mealtimes in the bright kitchen or using a fuzzy towel before bath time. The song, the light and the towel will all become cues for your baby, helping him or her internally organize a daily routine.

Myth

If I don't do everything the professionals tell me I will seem like a bad parent.

Reality

You know best what feels right for your child and your family.

Reassurance:

More services are not necessarily better. It is important to find professionals with whom you have mutual respect and a shared viewpoint about what is most beneficial for your child. It is important to ask questions of professionals when something is unclear and to respectfully disagree when you are uncomfortable with something or someone. You will be your child's best advocate until he or she is able to advocate for themselves.

RESOURCES

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
(tsbvi.edu)

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