

VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Be knowledgeable about different levels of visual impairment. **Near vision** refers to difficulties seeing in the 12-16 inch range. This affects a person's ability to read. **Far vision** is the most commonly detected visual problem. **Low vision** allows one to perform visual tasks, but with less speed and accuracy. Students may also have difficulty with color discrimination or depth perception. Students who are **blind** do not have the ability to see print at any magnification and rely on other senses.

Be aware of students who may be exhibiting signs of a visual problem in your classroom.

- Poor handwriting
- Rubbing eyes
- Shutting or covering one eye
- Inattentiveness
- Light sensitivity
- Losing place when reading
- Difficulty with reading
- Achievement/ability disparity
- Unusual facial expressions when reading
- Eye discomfort (burning, scratching, itching eyes)
- Holding reading materials at an inappropriate distance
- Discomfort following work (headaches, dizziness, nausea)
- Body rigidity
- Double vision and/or unusual blurring
- Reversals (a tendency to reverse letters, syllables, or vowels)
- Letter confusion (confusing letters of similar shape)
- Poor spacing or difficulty staying on the line when writing
- Dislike of visual tasks
- Continuous physical indications (crossed eyes, pupils of uneven size, drooping eyelids, excessive blinking, sties)

If there is reason for concern, express your thoughts with the parents, the school nurse, and other school professionals if necessary.

Alter the physical environment of the classroom.

- Allow the student to move to the place where they can see and/or hear best.
- Be aware of the lighting, more or less may be necessary.
- Do not teach in front of a window, glare can be a problem.
- Re-orient the student whenever physical changes are made. A formal re-orientation coupled with a brief informal orientation (including exploration and question and answer time) will help.
- Keep all doors completely opened or closed.
- Provide enough space for the student's adaptive equipment.

Hold an orientation prior to the start of everyday school activities.

- Establish where important items are located in the classroom. This should include the student's desk, closets, wastebaskets, doorway, etc.
- Orient the student to the general building. Be conscious of overwhelming the individual. Some less necessary locations can be learned at a later time.
- Be aware of any mobility guidance (cane, dog, guide, electronic) and protective movement techniques.

Utilize helpful teaching strategies and practices.

- Allow hands on learning whenever possible.
- Start teaching on a concrete level and move to the abstract.
- Allow time and a half to complete assignments.
- Alternate visual learning, auditory learning, and motor activities to prevent fatigue.
- When writing on the chalkboard be sure to verbalize the work being presented.
- Be specific when giving directions.
- Keep rules the same for everyone.
- Be prepared to alter test procedures.
- Lightly touch the student's hand when giving them an object.
- Be sure to give direct feedback; nonverbal cues may not be noticeable.
- Provide word and concept meanings. Concepts are harder for individuals with a visual impairment.
- Keep noise level low.
- Educate the other students, especially regarding safety issues.
- Call the individual by name.
- Encourage independence in your actions.
- Explain transitions before they occur.
- Do not underestimate the child's capabilities!

Incorporate adaptive educational equipment. There are several hundred types of adaptive equipment. The most recent technology includes: Speech Synthesizers, Braille computers, Text Magnification, talking calculators and spellers, and raised line drawing boards and paper. Numerous aids are also available. These include: Braille atlas, raised clock faces, adaptable sports equipment, science kits, and long hand writing kits.

Develop a plan for fire drills and other emergencies.

Additional Resources:

Bradley-Johnson, S. & Morgan, S. (2002). Best practices in planning effective instruction for students who are visually impaired or blind. In Thomas, A. & Grimes, J., Best practices in school psychology IV. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Bradley-Johnson, S. & Sorenson, R. (1997). Visual impairments. In G.G. Bear & K.M. Minke, Children's needs II: Development, problems, and alternatives. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Choate, J. (1997). *Successful inclusive teaching: Proven ways to detect and correct special needs*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Russell-Fox, J. (1997). Teaching children with various types of disabilities. *Young Children*, 52, 81-83.

www.as.wvu.edu/~scidis/vision.html: Strategies for Teaching Students with Visual Impairments.

www.usca.edu/ds/TeachVI.html: Teaching Students with Visual Impairments.