**Tips on How to Support Visually Impaired Child in Early Years Setting**

**Basics**

* Allow plenty of visits and time to explore
* Use of observation to build up a picture about the child
* Keep the environment stable where possible
* Avoid floor hazards-remove clutter as much as possible.
* Make a safe place for the child or create one area they can go to that is consistent
* Have a set routine and clear rules
* A timeline with tactile elements
* Use the child’s name first when you start to talk
* Tell the child when you are leaving- so the child can keep track of what is going on
* Lighting- Good level of illumination without glare, dim patchy light can make tasks inaccessible
* Remember to use lights on dull days
* Glare- use of blinds to control the amount of sunlight, seating position with back to light, teachers should avoid standing in front of windows, can get glare from reflection from polished surfaces, use of matt laminate rather than shiny
* Give the child plenty of time to explore new things

**Colour & Contrast**

* Make sure the object of interest stands out in contrast to the background e.g. yellow banana on green plate.
* Books with clear illustrations
* Use mark making tools e.g. pencils which make a strong mark
* Outline the inset of puzzles in black
* Add colour to glue
* Ensure paint brushes and what is in the pot is contrasting
* Use a coloured contrasting place mat to table and activity objects.

**Toys and Objects**

* Good colour contrast
* Any lettering is bold and clear
* Reflects light or fluorescent
* Encourages children to use their eyes to follow an object
* Encourages development of hand-eye co-ordination
* Encourages good co-ordination of hands
* Encourages development of fine finger control
* Some variety to touch
* Has moving parts
* Discrete pieces can be discriminated by touch
* Encourages understanding of cause and effect
* Makes a sound or other cue to an action having occurred
* Encourages physical play eg running or jumping
* Encourages development of sense of smell
* Use real objects for sorting and counting
* Use interesting textures, not just plastic
* Play listening games and use sound clues – any hearing needs to be used

**Mobility**

* Where possible, ensure bold contrast of door frames to walls/doors.
* Do not leave doors ajar.
* Ensure bold contrast of edge of table to floor and chairs etc.
* In areas where a child is having more bumps or difficulties in seeing something, a piece of contrasting colour tape or paint could be used to make the area/edge/corner etc stand out.

**Communication**

* + - * Use their name at the beginning
      * Introduce yourself so they know who is talking
      * Remember they may not see gestures or facial expressions-especially over distance.
      * Tell them when you are leaving or coming
      * Talk about the pictures and toys
      * Use specific directional language e.g. over here could be anywhere

**Social Interaction**

* The child needs opportunities to interact with peers in a wide variety of situations and activities-model and initiate these.
* Lack of sight can have a profound effect on the child’s ability to interact socially. Social clues such as body language, gesture, eye contact or facial expressions may be missed or understood, and alternative ways of reading other people’s feelings needs to be actively taught.
* Parallel play and learning through parallel play will need support.

**Over 80% of ALL learning is through vision. A visual impairment is a significant barrier to learning and development.**

**Please contact the Vision and Hearing Team if you have any queries or need support. The child does not need any diagnosis or known visual impairment to be referred.**

[**SensoryImpairmentTeam@portsmouthcc.gov.uk**](mailto:SensoryImpairmentTeam@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)

**Early years guidance**

The RNIB has a new publication, called Focus on Foundation: including children with impaired vision in early years settings, that closely follows the format of the QCA's Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage. Here are some examples of useful points mentioned under the six areas of learning:

**Personal, emotional and social development**

* Ensure that a visually impaired child is fully aware of the range of activities and materials available in the setting.
* Gentle appropriate physical contact can keep you and the child in touch.
* Build self-confidence by devising games that make use of the skills of the child rather than emphasising their differences.
* Understand that the child may not readily learn appropriate behaviour through observation of peers.

**Communication, language and literacy**

* For younger visually impaired children, plenty of direct one-to-one conversations with an adult are essential.
* The child's most appropriate seating position in group sessions should be discussed with a specialist teacher.
* Sloping work surfaces (for children who need to get close to their work) and good task lighting (such as an anglepoise lamp) may be needed.

Children with visual impairment may not necessarily have to be playing alongside sighted children to be communicating with them. At one nursery a group of boys were playing with musical instruments in the home corner while a blind boy sat apart on his own. When the blind boy started laughing at the sounds the other boys were making they responded by playing up to amuse him further. It may have appeared that the blind child was isolated, but he was not.

**Mathematical development**

* Counting objects into a container where sound is generated is effective, for example, marbles into a biscuit tin.
* Additional equipment may include an abacus; tactile dice; number shapes; tactile dominoes.
* Use a wide variety of 3D plane shapes before introducing 2D ones. Knowledge and understanding of the world
* Children who are visually impaired may need to be shown relevant items at close range or view smaller objects under magnification.
* A child's understanding of his own past may be reinforced by use of objects where photos are not helpful.

**Physical development**

* Specialist advice on safety should be sought from a qualified teacher of visually impaired children. Plastic lenses for glasses are usually prescribed now, which are safe to wear at all times, but this should be checked.
* One-to-one assistance to move independently will be needed in the early stages of learning. Older children should be familiarised with changes in gradients before starting an activity.
* Finger strength will need to be developed in a child who may later need to learn Braille.

**Creative development**

* Children with impaired colour perception still need to be taught the vocabulary of colour and encouraged to find strategies to identify colours. This may include pairing with a fully sighted partner, or labelling crayons.
* Visually impaired children may not have had the same experiences as fully sighted friends and need to develop understanding before being able to participate fully in imaginative role-play.

**Points for inclusion**

Whatever setting a young child with visual impairment attends, there are some key points for practitioners to follow to give the child a sense of belonging and self-worth.

Visually impaired children respond better within an established predictable routine in a carefully thought-through environment.

* Words describing visual functions should be used routinely, such as, 'Look at me' or 'Come and see this'. A visually impaired child, even a blind child, will take on board the vocabulary of seeing and will 'look' in his or her own way.
* Always use the child's name first to gain attention.
* Opportunities for spontaneous play with sensitive guidance will be an essential way of learning.
* Take account of the child's individual needs regarding lighting, sound levels and seating as advised by a teacher of the visually impaired.
* Maintain a running commentary of what is happening within the group to inform and reassure the child.

The transition to nursery is into an unfamiliar environment. Build confidence and understanding by:

* providing a quiet home-base in the nursery where the child feels safe
* encouraging the child to move out from there, learning key routes
* showing the child what is available within the nursery on a daily basis
* encouraging the child to have a go at something new, and build in success
* exploring the inside and outside areas with purposeful movement.