Vision Impairment (VI)

The term visual impairment including blindness means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects the child's educational performance, and includes both partial sight and blindness.

Characteristics

Students with vision loss can learn to do virtually all the activities that others can do, but they often need to do them in a different way or by using different tools and materials. Central to their learning is touching, listening, smelling, tasting, moving, and using whatever vision that they have. Types of vision loss might be strabismus, congenital cataracts, retinopathy of prematurity, retinitis pigmentosa, coloboma, optic nerve hypoplasia, and cortical visual impairment. Vision problems should be addressed as soon as possible. Vision screenings may occur at birth and then at wellness visits as early as 6 months. Some signs may include: eyes that don't move together, crossed eyes, eyes that turn out or in, eyes that bulge/dance/bounce, repeated shutting or covering of one eye, frequent blinking/squinting/eye-rubbing/face crunching, sitting too close to TV or holding toys/books too close to eyes.

In meeting the criteria for a visual impairment, the child with a visual impairment has been determined by a licensed ophthalmologist/ optometrist: to have no vision or to have a serious visual loss after correction; or to have a progressive medical condition that will result in no vision or a serious visual loss after correction. Along with the evaluation by the licensed ophthalmologist/optometrist, a functional vision evaluation and a learning media assessment by a certified teacher of children with visual impairments must been done, as well as an orientation and mobility evaluation by a person certified as an orientation and mobility specialist.

Tips for Parents

- Learn as much as you can about your child’s specific visual impairment. The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child.
- Encourage curiosity and explore new things and places often with your child. Give lots of opportunity to touch and investigate objects, ask questions, and hear explanations of what something is, where it comes from, and so on.
- Learn how to adapt your home given the range and degree of your child’s visual impairment. Help your son/daughter explore the house and learn to navigate it safely.
- Encourage your child’s independence by letting him/her do things, rather than you doing them. Teach how to do a chore by using hands-on guidance, give lots of practice opportunities with feedback.
- Work with the early interventionist or school staff to build a solid individualized plan of services/supports that address your child’s unique developmental and educational needs.
- Talk to other parents of children who have visual impairments similar to your child’s. They can be a great source of support and insight in the challenges and joys of raising a child with vision problems.
Resources

Texas Project First  http://www.texasprojectfirst.org

Special Education Legal Framework  https://framework.esc18.net/display/Webforms/ESC18-FW-Summary.aspx

Center for Parent Information and Resources  http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/visualimpairment

American Council of the Blind of Texas  http://www.acbtexas.org

Bookshare  https://www.bookshare.org