

Module: **Communication and Emergent Literacy:
Early Intervention Issues**

**Session 1: Overview of Communication and
Literacy**

**Study Questions and Answers for Recommended Reading D: Warren
& Hatton**

Warren, D., & Hatton, D. (2003). Cognitive development of children with visual impairments. In I. Rapin & S. Segalowitz (Eds.), *Handbook of neuropsychology: Vol. 7, Part II. Child neuropsychology* (2nd ed., pp. 439-458). New York: Elsevier.

1. Describe the social-emotional phenomenon of attachment.
During the first few months of life, infants begin to imitate the behaviors of people around them, such as smiling and vocalizing, to initiate social interactions. As infants grow older, they tend to narrow their behaviors to a select group of people such as their caregivers, and become increasingly wary of strangers. The development of attachment depends as much on the infant's behavior as it does on the parents' recognition and response to those behaviors.
2. How may a visual impairment interfere with attachment?
Infants with visual impairments may not be able to see their caregivers' faces and emotions, so they are may be as likely to respond or show interest in them. Also, they may not be able to use social referencing, due to their inability to see their caregivers or their surrounding environment. This may result in a lack of interest in their surroundings, as well as increased anxiety about moving away from caregivers. Additionally, the interactions of parents of children with visual impairments may be fewer in quantity, as well as decreased quality, based on their emotional response to the infant's initiations for interaction.
3. How might visual impairments impact the development of early communication?
How can caregivers reduce this effect?
Parents of infants with visual impairments may not recognize their children's behaviors as attempts to communicate, and may view them instead as behavioral problems. Lack of eye contact can impede communication development, because infants often begin vocalizing while looking at their parents. Also, when infants are unable to see and anticipate events, such as being picked up by a parent, they may react negatively in surprise or fear.

Parents may read this reaction as a negative response to their attempts to interact with their child. Caregivers can reduce this effect by learning to respond to their child's cues. Specialized early intervention may also help parents by providing guidance, access to information, and affirmation of positive interactions.

4. Delays in motor development reduce opportunities for cognitive development. How may motor development be affected by visual impairment?
Children with visual impairments lack the visual lure that facilitates attachment to parents as well as providing motivation to move and knowledge about the environment. Infants with visual impairments often have limited hand regard and delays in acquiring concepts about space, distance, and orientation. As a result, lack of motivation, fear of the unknown, and lack of opportunities for exploration can delay their motor development.

5. Gross measures of communication development show that language is often less affected by visual impairments than other areas of development. More in-depth studies, however, show differences in language development in children with visual impairments. What delays and difficulties frequently occur in language development in children with visual impairments? How can the parents of children with visual impairments facilitate language development?
 - **Lack of vision impedes prelinguistic communication, which then delays the development of language. The major differences are qualitative, including the types of acquired words and the understanding of pragmatics. Children with visual impairments tend to acquire words that are directly related to themselves and their experiences. They do not drop words from their vocabulary and seldom extend words. Later, they may have difficulties initiating and maintaining conversations with others.**
 - **Parents' behavior plays a large role in the language development of children with visual impairments. Parents of children with visual impairments tend to label objects instead of describing them in detail, use more imperatives, and speak using the future tense more frequently than parents of sighted children. Parents of infants with visual impairments should use more vocalizations and touch to make up for the lack of visual input, and they should use turn-taking to encourage verbal interactions.**

6. How is the development of children with visual impairments differentially affected if the child has (a) low vision versus blindness and (b) congenital blindness versus adventitious blindness?
Children's development may be correlated with the amount of functional vision they have—i.e., an infant with low vision may not experience as many delays as infants with blindness. Studies of the identification of routes within a familiar setting suggest that children with low vision have better spatial and environmental concepts than children who are blind. Likewise, children who

experience adventitious blindness tend to have better spatial orientation and memory than those who are congenitally blind. Young children with less vision or blindness tend to have better verbal memory and auditory awareness than their sighted peers.

7. What are the relative merits and disadvantages of comparing the development of children with visual impairments to the development of children with typical sight?
By comparing children with visual impairments to typically sighted children, parents and researchers have a reference point for the development of an individual child. The disadvantage of this practice is the possibility that parents and researchers assume that there is a single, linear path of development and that differences in behavior or order of development may be considered aberrations. They may risk underestimating an individual's developmental capabilities, or devaluing certain functional behaviors simply because they do not conform to the development of sighted children.