

Module: **Developmentally Appropriate Orientation and Mobility**

Session 1: Foundations of Developmentally Appropriate Orientation and Mobility

Handout E: A Guide for Teachers and Therapists Working With My Child

Brown, C. (2004). *A guide for teachers and therapists working with my child*. Chapel Hill, NC: Early Intervention Training Center for Infants and Toddlers With Visual Impairments, FPG Child Development Institute, UNC-CH.

- **Say "Hello" and "Good-bye."** My child will need to get to know you before you touch him or pick him up. You may need to sit close and talk to me and my child so that he can become familiar with your voice. Always talk to my child before you pick him up; let him know what you are going to do. This will keep him from becoming startled. When leaving, don't "disappear"; be sure to say good-bye. "Hello" and "good-bye" rituals are important to children who are visually impaired because they usually cannot see people coming and going in their world.
- **Let my child know what you are going to do.** Because my child may not have the vision to know what is going to happen next, let my child know what you are going to do. For example, before picking him up, say his name and give a verbal cue that our family uses ("Ready to come up, up, up!").
- **Most children with visual impairments have some functional vision.** Very few children are totally blind. I will describe how my child sees things, or we can explore this together. There are things that help my child use his vision the best. This may include how we use light, color, contrast, and how we present toys. Be careful not to bombard my child with too much information. My child may be visually attracted to familiar people and toys more than unfamiliar people and toys. Also, the way that my child is positioned will affect how he can use his vision.
- **Feel comfortable using words such as *see* and *look*.** These words are as much a part of the vocabulary of the child with a visual impairment as they are of anyone else's. He uses them to describe his methods of seeing, either touching or looking very closely, and in expressions used in daily conversations, such as "See you later, alligator!"

- **Encourage my child to explore actively.** Arrange the environment to allow my child to explore independently. This involves considering my child's developmental level, providing objects that consider my child's sensory preferences and interests, being responsive to his cues and vocalizations, and sharing his interests.
- **Introduce new activities slowly and give plenty of time for my child to do an activity.** Without good vision, my child does not know what a new toy or new activity is like. It may take him more time to be willing to touch and play with toys or engage in activities. Activate toys away from my child so he can become familiar with them. Let him be the one to reach out or show interest in the toy before initiating play. Be sure to give him plenty of time to play with the toy so he can become familiar with it and be able to understand what is going to happen during the activity. He may "tell" you he is unsure by acting scared or starting to cry. If he does, stop and see if he can explore it in a different way.
- **Help my child become familiar with new spaces.** My child will usually do better in his home or in a familiar place because he understands where he is and feels secure. In new spaces and places, my child will focus on trying to learn where he is and may not be ready to play. Use sounds to help him understand where things are (e.g., sound of water in bathroom, refrigerator in kitchen). Allow time to let him move (e.g., roll, crawl, scoot, move in his walker, wheelchair) and find areas of the room (e.g., the rug, tile floor).
- **Help my child understand language.** It is not meaningful to provide a nonstop verbal description of everything that is happening all of the time. You can talk about what the child has his hands on or the noises that he is hearing. Remember that you don't have to talk loudly!
- **Provide ample experiences with real objects.** Use real objects as much as possible to provide the experiences needed to develop concepts.

Adapted from: American Foundation for the Blind (Producer). (2000). *What do you do when you see a blind person* [Video]. (Available from the American Foundation for the Blind, 11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300, New York, NY 10001)