

Module: **Developmentally Appropriate Orientation and Mobility**

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## **Session 1: Foundations of Developmentally Appropriate Orientation and Mobility**

### **Handout H: Hand Searching in Infants and Toddlers: Suggestions for Parents and Caregivers**

Sapp, W. (2004). *Hand searching in infants and toddlers: Suggestions for parents and caregivers*. Chapel Hill, NC: Early Intervention Training Center for Infants and Toddlers With Visual Impairments, FPG Child Development Institute, UNC-CH.

Learning to tactually hand search is an important skill for children with low vision or blindness. *Hand searching* refers to exploring the area within arm's reach to locate an item. Hand searching provides immediate opportunities to learn about the environment the child is searching, increases the likelihood that children will have opportunities to play with objects and toys, and helps children begin to develop skills and concepts they will use throughout their lives. At first children will search randomly, but as they gain more skills and knowledge, they will learn to use circular and grid patterns to search for objects. Children may begin to demonstrate circular and grid patterns at a very young age, but they will rarely master these techniques until they are older.

To use a *circular pattern search*, the child begins by making a small circle with the palm flat in the middle of the area to be searched. The child continues making bigger and bigger circles until the object is found. For toddlers, making one or two circles as they search is an excellent beginning circular pattern.

To use a *grid pattern search*, the child starts in one corner of the area to be searched and uses a grid pattern to search the entire area. For example, when searching a highchair tray, the child may start in the top right-hand corner and search across to the top left corner. The child would then move the hand down, search back across to the right side, and repeat until the entire tray has been searched. By moving down a small distance each time, the child searches the whole area. Toddlers will not be able to use a full grid pattern but may be able to search two or more sides of an enclosed space to begin getting the concept of searching in one direction until reaching the edge of the space and then moving to search a slightly different area.

Here are 12 simple ways you can help your child learn to search with his or her hands:

#### **Getting started**

1. Place objects in consistent locations close to your child, such as in a defined play space.

2. When your child drops a toy or object and it rolls out of reach, move it closer to your child so he or she has a chance to find it.
3. Do not automatically place objects in your child's hand. Place objects and toys near your child so he or she can search for it.
4. When your child drops something, say "Look for your toy" or "You can find it" rather than immediately handing it back to your child.
5. Provide verbal encouragement to help your child to search for toys within arm's reach, but provide additional cues if your child becomes frustrated.
6. Provide your child with some toys that make noise so the sound can encourage your child to search.
7. Allow your child to see and hear you drop items. Talk about how you are searching for the item you dropped.
8. Use hand-under-hand modeling by placing your child's hand on top of yours as you move your hand to search for an object your child has dropped.
9. When your child is finger feeding, place food items in different locations on the tray so your child has to search to find them.

#### **Beginning to use search patterns**

10. Use hand-under-hand modeling to demonstrate circular and grid patterns of searching.
11. When introducing search patterns, start by modeling circular patterns in open spaces such as on a play blanket where the edges are larger than the child's arm length.
12. Model using circular or grid patterns on enclosed spaces such as a highchair tray.

#### **Where will my child search?**

Your child must be in a stable position to be able to use his or her hands to search. Where your child will search will depend on how he or she is positioned. As children's motor skills develop, the places they will be able to search will increase.

*Sitting searches:* When children are seated in a highchair, it will be easiest for them to search in front, such as on the tray. When sitting on the floor, children will most easily be able to search to their front or sides. Some children will need to support themselves with one hand while they search with the other hand.

*Standing searches:* When children are cruising and walking, they will be able to stand and search the sofa cushions and low tabletops. When their balance improves, they will be able to squat from standing and search the floor. With practice, children can learn to search one and then multiple shelves to find a toy or favorite object.

#### **Remember**

The purpose of hand searching is for your child to independently find toys and objects within arm's reach. Encourage your child to search for objects as often as possible. Show your child search patterns, but do not expect your child to use them until he or she is older. Hand searching should be an enjoyable experience for your child as he or she successfully finds toys and objects.