

ORIENTATION AND VISION

We all tend to define many of our experiences, (including how to socialize and general expectations for functional activities), by our vision. For students with visual impairments, it is sometimes necessary to facilitate other ways for a student with visual impairments to:

- Experience an 'event',
- Participate within their environment or
- Gain some understanding of general concepts

For most of us, our world makes sense because we have a visual framework with which to define it. Your student's experience of their world becomes limited in part, because of:

- Vision
- Potential limited movement and
- Physical exploration

As caregivers, therapists, and helpers, we need to ask ourselves:

- Is our student making sense of his/her world?
- What senses is s/he using as a way to interact with the environment?
- Is s/he using vision as a tool to understand the world?
- Does your student have a comprehension of the world around them?
- Does your student understand the words or concepts that we are talking about?
- How can **we** help our student to make sense of the world?

Most students with visual impairments require assistance in **orientating** to their world. Often, they have little idea of orientation concepts, including such concepts as:

- Before/After
- In front of/Behind
- Beside
- Up/Down
- Colours, etc.

These concepts need to be embedded within activities such as:

- transitioning from one room to another, or
- movement in general

The student's team can help provide orientation strategies by blending the student's vision skills with other stronger skills they may have, to assist the student in developing his/her own orientation strategies. The following are some examples:

Example #1

- Using object cues in the environment and having your student look for, reach and eventually match it with the object cue in his/her hand.

- Developing a 'Chat' book with classmates, encouraging the student to use it by touching an item that s/he has seen on a walk, which has been added to the book.
- Describing an item from the chat book through colour, texture, and shape
- Having the student try to find the object
- Describe the setting where the object was found
- Adding concepts such as "in front", "behind", etc. in your description of where the object was found or where s/he is walking

Example #2

- Using object cues in your student's environment and having her/him look for, reach and eventually match the object cue in his/her hand
- Matching a color that s/he is identifying in a 'vision room' or a 'vision lesson' with concepts such as "red" and "round" for apple
- Using the same colour to create a line on the wall in the hallway to direct the student to a familiar room by following a coloured line
- Adding a texture to a coloured line and encourage your student to 'cruise' by feeling the along the wall
- Eventually visually orienting the student to a coloured strip to get to the destination

Your student's skills will include:

- Sensory (hand use in touching object cues, adding different textures)
- Learning concepts of directionality (e.g., "forward", when spoken by the assistant), and learning colours, etc.
- Using hands to hold onto object cues, cruise along the walls, etc.

REMEMBER

If your student has a visual impairment, s/he may not have an understanding of concepts that we find simple and commonplace. Imagine trying to understand the concept of a 'rock' if you ...

- are not able to see the rock,
- are further limited by movement,
- are not able to touch the rock,
- understand the concepts of hard, cold etc.
- understand other words or concepts that describe the rock.



Here the assistant is holding up actual examples of colour for choice making, rather than just using the words.



This student is encouraged to touch and explore the objects before making a choice, in order to provide more sensory information.