

INTRODUCTION



Infants and toddlers with visual impairments have unique needs which require specific interventions and adaptations in order for them to access and begin to understand their world. These fact sheets are designed to be used individually or as a set by families and professionals. The settings presented in this series of fact sheets are those most often encountered by young children:

1. **The Home**
2. **Medical Visits**
3. **The Community**
4. **Toddler Programs**

CENTRAL TO ALL FOUR SETTINGS ARE THE FOLLOWING CONCEPTS:

- **85% of early learning is visual.** Typically sighted babies watch the people, objects, and activities within their world hundreds of times before they attempt to try to do something by themselves.
- **Babies with visual impairments miss out on this huge volume of incidental visual learning.** They can have many cognitive gaps in how they understand the world and require early and intense intervention by their families and the professionals who work with them.
- **Environmental Mediation:** Infants and toddlers with visual impairments are dependent on their families to learn to interact with and experience the world around them. Most often this responsibility falls upon parents, but anyone close to the child can help in this effort. The person who helps the child explore and interact is an environmental mediator — mediating between the child and the surroundings so the child can better understand what is there (Davidson and Simmons, 1984).
- Key elements in **Environmental Mediation:**
 - provide **access** to the world and the people and things that are in it.
 - set up situations so the child can **explore** this world and interact with it, utilizing his other senses as well as any residual vision.
 - help the child **interpret** what he experiences so he can begin to understand the world around him (Davidson and Simmons, 1984).

- **Experiential Learning:** Since children with visual impairments cannot watch the people and activities taking place around them hundreds of times, they need to **experience** them hundreds of times in the context of everyday living. Utilizing a multi-sensory approach, the environmental mediator includes the child in as many activities as possible from beginning to end so the child can begin to generalize the many concepts contained within them.

Please note that in the interests of gender equality and readability, the personal pronouns “he” and “she” have been used alternately by fact sheet. The term “visual impairment” was chosen as it includes all levels of vision loss.

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REFERENCES

Davidson, I.F.W.K. & Simmons, J.N. (1984) Mediating the environment for young blind children: A conceptualisation. In I.F.W.K. Davidson and J. N. Simmons (Eds.), *The Early Development of Blind Children: A Book of Readings* (pp. 83-91). Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

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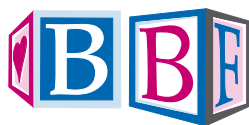
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