ChildVision

National Education Centre for Blind Children

Early Years Services

Some ideas to help your child practice O&M skills

As your child becomes more active, you can help them practice different ways of getting around safely (mobility) and being aware of their environment (orientation). This can start at home and widen into your local area.

Orientation

Different rooms in your home have different smells, floor textures and sounds. As your child begins to move around on their own or with your help, point these out. You could comment:

"Can you hear those swishing sounds? That's the washing machine; we must be near to the kitchen."

"You're standing on the carpet in the hall; doesn't it feel different from the wooden floor in the front room?"

"That's a car on the road outside, the noise sounds louder when you're in the front of the house."

"Can you smell the dinner cooking in the kitchen? Show me where it is."

Mobility

Practicing early O&M skills together can be fun and done through games and activities. Here are some ideas:

Try marking your child's special places in a way that will have meaning for them. For example, choose some material with a nice feel or paper with a raised texture. Tape some of this on their bedroom door, or on the back of their chair at the dinner table to help identify them.

Encourage your child to practice trailing walls, both to find their way around and give them a sense of control over where they are and where they are going. Trailing is done by slightly curling the fingers and holding the back of the hand against the wall but slightly ahead of the body. The wall isn't used for support, but as a guideline.

When a child is used to furniture being in a certain place, it can be very confusing not to find it there – especially if you can't see that it's been moved. If you are going to rearrange a room tell your child what you are doing, and include them in the process.

Make up travel games to play with your child starting around the house linking rooms to rooms. As they get older you can expand these games to the locality.

Ask your child to tell you where the two of you have been and how you got back. "What did I pass?"

Play follow-the-leader so your child follows the sound of your voice around the house. Also try this outside in a garden or park as your voice will be more difficult to locate in a large open space.

When your child becomes familiar with getting from A to B, get them to be the leader and show you the way. This will help concentration and boost self-confidence.

As you walk around the locality with your child point out driveways, corners, post-boxes, trees and other permanent landmarks. These will become useful when they begin to get around alone. For example "If we go out the front door, walk left, and count three driveways we'll get to granny's house."

Remind your child to use footpaths as clues. If they are supposed to be following the path and find themselves walking on grass instead, they'll know they have gone off course.

Use clear directional language and begin teaching concepts such as in front, behind, over/under, early on. For example say "the cup is on your right", "the door is on your left". This aids development of essential orientation skills.

Consult your O&M instructor for input and ideas. It's never to early to ask...

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