

henshaws

beyond expectations

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• learning through play for your vision impaired child

Play can help children of all ages and abilities to develop in many ways. Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creative and Emotional skills can be developed through play, so it is important that babies and children are provided with opportunities to play and learn through these experiences.

It must be remembered that all children develop at their own pace with or without a visual impairment, so all children should be treated as individuals and not compared to others.

80% of all the information received by the brain comes through the eyes. Therefore, we need to create a stimulating environment where the child can use all their senses.

- Try to avoid background noise where possible to help your child focus on the activity provided.
- If your child is sensitive to light/ glare, plan to carry out the play experience where it will not cause discomfort or harm.
- Adapt/change activities to suit your child's needs and abilities. You know them best.
- Choose bright colourful toys with good contrast and interesting texture.
- Name objects as you use them to help your child learn, such as teddy, sponge, shoe etc.
- Be consistent when talking to your child – use the same words for objects.
- Sing rhymes, songs, and stories that encourage your child to engage more in the play experience.
- Have fun with your child – after all, play should be a fun and enjoyable experience. The child will hear this in your voice, over exaggerating your expressions may help. Remember that your voice and sounds are substituted for seeing your actions.

- A sighted child will see you approach to pick them up and see what is happening, a child with a visual impairment will not. Therefore, it is important to provide them with verbal and physical reassurance at all times.
- A child who cannot see may withdraw or become upset if not given the correct signs to keep reassured.
- When holding your child, talk cheek to cheek.
- When lifting your child – hold them first for a while and then tell the child what you are doing. For example – “we are going to get up now.”
- Use one toy at a time to prevent confusion. Toys with multiple functions may also be confusing.
- Try to introduce different textures in the toys.
- Place toys within reach so that they can feel them with their hands and feet.
- Talk and sing to your child whilst they are sitting on your lap, hold your child's hand on your face so they can feel the vibration of your voice.



• objects and toys

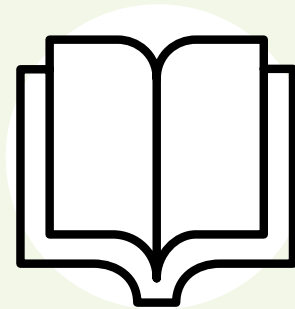
Remember that your child's first toys should be very simple and uncomplicated. They should have different textures, lights, sounds, colours and contrast to keep them interested.

As your child gets older, introduce more complicated toys that will encourage learning such as toys involving shape, sorting and size.

Objects and toys should be placed close to your child so they are able to look at each part carefully and not be confused by a cluttered background. Large, chunky toys are more suitable and interesting than small things in the early years. There are also many apps for ipads and tablets that can help with visual stimulation.

There is no need to buy expensive toys. There are many objects and materials that can create great playthings for your child (please see safety considerations at the end of this eBook) including:

- pots and pans and a wooden spoon from the kitchen
- small containers filled with rice, pasta etc
- feely boards or mats with different textures
- paint brushes and some water
- cloth books made from different fabrics
- materials with different textures, fur, tinfoil, shiny paper
- bubblewrap
- a box full of buttons, marble, stone etc (for older children who have stopped putting things in their mouth)
- For more information about toys and play, download the RNIB 'Let's Play' guide at <https://www.rnib.org.uk/family-friends-and-carers-resources-parents-blind-or-partially-sighted-children/lets-play>



● learning about water and bath time

Bath time can be great fun and a natural opportunity to talk and learn. Try these tips;

- explore using foam toys, pouring jugs, suction cups etc
- encourage patting and splashing the water and listen to the sound it makes
- scented soap and bubble bath can make bathtime more sensory
- toys that make noises when filled or emptied are great for learning
- pick up the foam and blow the bubbles
- the swimming baths is also another great way for children to explore the water. This activity will give the child a new opportunity to discover many new things and freedom. Try to choose a quiet time and stay close to your child while reassuring at all times.

● exploring indoors and outdoors

Children will find lots of learning experiences in both their indoor and outdoor environments, so let your child explore their environments and don't be afraid to let them get dirty and take risks! As long as the child is safe there is no reason why any adult should interfere with this opportunity to explore the world!

- If your child touches things as they move around, they will gradually start to recognise things and this will add to their security.
- Introduce your child to things such as sand and dough when they are at a young age so that they are comfortable with different textures. This will help build confidence also.
- Encourage your child to climb or crawl over low furniture.
- Soft play areas and ball pools are great ways of helping children to explore their environment.
- Take your child out in all weathers so that they can experience rain, wind, snow and not be afraid!
- Try to make all outings interesting – look for new things, smells and sounds!

● safety

Remember that all children need a safe environment to explore and enjoy their play experience. Here are a few things that you can do to make the play environment safe:

- Make sure doors are kept either fully closed or fully open.
- Lock away any medicines and cleaning materials.
- Move any small objects and breakable objects out of harms way.
- Make sure there are no wires trailing from lamps, Hoovers etc.
- Cover any sharp edges with bump covers or foam.
- Fit guards to protect children from fires and cookers.
- Fit safety gates to stairs, kitchen or where appropriate.
- Fit locks to any cupboards, videos, cabinets etc.
- Fit plug guards/covers to all accessible electrical sockets.
- Keep all furniture in the same place to help orientation.
- Use tactile markers to differentiate rooms. For example – spoon on the kitchen door, teddy bear for bedroom door.
- Use ‘bump-ons’ or tactile markers on doorframes to help distinguish internal and external doors.



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 www.henshaws.org.uk

Henshaws: 4a Washbrook House, Lancastrian Office Centre,
Talbot Road, Stretford, Manchester M32 0FP.

Contact us on: 0300 222 5555 or email: info@henshaws.org.uk

Registered charity number: 221888