



Early Years Services

**Up and About!
Basic O&M
skills for
young children**

Orientation and mobility is all about knowing where you are, getting to where you want to go, and doing so in a safe manner. Basic Orientation and Mobility skills can be introduced to babies of just a few months old.

Simple games, cuddles or tickles and communication are all part of their learning at this early stage. A young baby can be encouraged to move on a play mat by simply attaching their favourite toys to different corners.

Communicating with your child is essential to help develop their learning. Keep them informed of everything that is going on around them as this is how they learn to understand their environment.



One of the earliest skills is body awareness. This is an understanding of one's body, how it moves and how our bodies connect with our surroundings. This develops from all experience of movement. Use clear directional language to begin teaching concepts from early on.

Younger children with a visual impairment have fewer opportunities to seek toys if there is no visual motivation to find them. By setting up an overhead play gym with toys or objects makes it easy to reach, explore and mouth toys. Kitchen utensils can be of great interest to a child, like a wooden spoon, plastic tubs or metal measuring spoons. These objects have interesting textures and sounds that can entertain while a meal is being prepared.



Where possible, encourage your child to use the vision they have. Develop their visual awareness by introducing stimulating objects. Auditory and music toys are a great way of encouraging a child to move, reach or roll for something of interest. Ensure to include activities using no sound to continue to encourage visual attention skills. Favourite toys can help to encourage a child to lift their head up, especially

during tummy time – see ChildVision's Tummy Time handout. Holding objects just in front or a little above head will encourage them to hold their head up. Pillows or soft matting may enable them to sit safely unaided for short periods.

Changing a child's position often is important as they can become too content in their own space and can become too dependent on items being handed to them. Even a small bit of

effort to reach out is good practise; a little distance may encourage a child to roll toward a toy. Keep toys or other favourite items in a familiar place, like a toy box at the bottom of the play mat.



Your child will expect to find them there and this will aid early orientation skills. They will get to know their space and feel more comfortable when they find things where they expect them to be. Give your child plenty of time to study and explore objects in their own way.

Looking can be very tiring for some children and of great effort. Relaxation times in a darkened room with one light used at a time may be useful in helping to relax. Present visual or auditory stimulating objects to attract a child's attention, to encourage him to turn or reach towards them when they are learning to sit up. When a child is able to sit unaided, they should still be encouraged to reach for toys as this will help develop balance skills.



Encourage your child to explore and be aware of different floor textures at home in various rooms. Describe how it feels, if it's hard, soft, rough, warm, smooth. Small play areas allows a child to develop a sense of space, distance and awareness of the where they are in the room.

You can encourage a child to crawl by letting them experience this position by helping them onto their hands and knees. Often children with visual impairment can move around without crawling and may show a preference to bum shuffle.

Whatever way your child moves about, it is important that when they come in contact with furniture they are encouraged to pull themselves up and kneel. Placing a favourite item on a raised area can be a good motivator to encourage a child to move to a kneeling position.

Kneeling helps core development and balance.

Kneeling can be moved to high kneeling and then encourage the child to pull themselves up to a standing position at furniture or at a low table to play with toys.



Once standing, toys can be moved just out of reach to encourage your child to start side stepping. As this skill develops, the child may start furniture cruising and begin to move with ease from sitting to standing and being able to safely sit back on the floor. Pushing toys like a toy walker, buggy or trolley can give security and stability to a child who is starting to learn how to walk. These toys also provide a safety barrier and can help when a child starts to learn cane skills and develop an awareness of the environment around them. It will teach them to pick up information on their surrounding from exploring what they come in contact with.



It can take longer for a child with a visual impairment to realise that sounds come from a source as they cannot see the connection. We can bring them to the sound source in order to practically teach them about the environment. Rather than automatically giving a child the sound that they want, encourage or help them to search for it. Talk about the direction it is coming from, if it's loud or quiet, near or far away.

Through their early development, involve your child in everyday tasks that they can learn. Talk through all the stages involved naming objects and explaining what you are doing. Use the same routine each time, be consistent. Use age appropriate language, repeat where needed and make sure to give your child plenty of time to respond as it can take longer to process information without vision.

When a child is out travelling in a wheelchair or buggy "on body" signs may be used to develop their awareness when moving. Tell your child where you are going. A touch on the shoulder can identify a turn to the right or left. Up or down signs can be used for ramps, lifts, escalators and steps. Again commenting on the surroundings will help develop an understanding of travelling and can be of comfort or reassurance for a child, especially in loud or busy areas.

Try to ensure that your child knows who is around them and what is happening. Make sure your child knows what you are doing by giving them lots of sound and touch cues. Tell them when others come in. Encourage them to listen and be aware of others. Provide opportunities for your child to explore under close supervision in a safe and comfortable setting and this will improve their confidence.

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





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Reg. No. 453711. Reg. Charity No. 20001278. CHY 817

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