



How to support children with Visual Impairment

Behavioural Management

What are the common behavioural problems of children with visual impairment?

Young children with visual impairment may sometimes have socially inappropriate behaviours, e.g. finger flicking in front of their eyes, eye pressing and rubbing, body rocking, etc. Some of them like touching or pestering others; some forget to face the person they are listening or talking to; some keep their heads down or lack facial expression. These behaviours will make others feel disturbed and perplexed.

Some children lack confidence because they cannot accept their visual impairment or are discouraged by too much negative experience. They become socially withdrawn, avoid contact with others or refuse to participate in new activities. As a result, their physical and psychological development is hindered. If they are forced by their parents to take part in social activities, they may develop emotional problems; and their relationship with their parents will sometimes be affected.

How to deal with their behavioural problems?

Parents should be aware of their own emotional responses first, e.g. negative emotions such as feeling shameful or angry at their children's unusual behaviour. If parents have these emotional responses, they should calm down first, then observe their children, analyse the underlying cause for their children's behaviour and manage accordingly.



There may be different underlying motives / causes for children's behavioural problem, such as:

- expression of emotions or needs
- exploration of the environment/objects
- seeking sensory stimulation
- avoidance of adults' requests or things they dislike
- obtaining tangible rewards / benefits
- failure to understand adults' instructions or requests

When children press their eyes for sensory stimulation or due to boredom, simply scolding them could not rectify the problem. Parents can let their children wear glasses to prevent them from doing so. Alternatively, children's hands can be kept occupied by asking them to fetch things or join in fun activities. Parents can also consider setting limits for the self-stimulatory behaviour in designated places or times only.

If children's behavioural problems are caused by inadequate social skills, parents should remind them on basic social manner, e.g. facing the source of the voice, smiling gently, speaking softly. Meanwhile, they can teach their children to express their want in words and wait patiently for their response. Giving more verbal descriptions of your body language and even letting children touch your face can enhance their ability to express emotions. Parents can also role-play with their children to teach them social manner.

Parents should adopt a consistent behavioural standard for their children with visual impairment, avoid over-protecting them or over-looking their behavioural problem due to the visual impairment. Parents should teach them, starting from a young age, to respect the rights and preferences of other family members. Overindulging in the children with visual impairment and neglecting other family members will make the child become too self-centred.



What are the basic principles of parenting?

Parenting children with or without visual impairment is similar. Here are some basic principles:

- Ensure that children are provided with a safe environment to explore freely.
- Parents should work closely together and adopt consistent parenting style.
- Give clear instructions and be firm.
- Be positive in handling children's problems. For instance, pay attention to the unexpectedly good behaviour and give specific praise; communicate with them and solve problems together; join in fun activities to maintain a good parent-child relationship.
- Have reasonable expectations for children.
- Accept children's inadequacies.
- Seek help from others to take care of children when you need a break for yourself.

How to boost children's self-esteem and self-confidence?

Children's sense of self-esteem and self-confidence relates to how well they accept themselves. Parents' acceptance helps their children accept themselves. To boost their children's self-esteem and self-confidence, parents should be aware of any unresolved negative emotions, and whether their attitude and words have made their children feel bad. Here are some basic principles on nurturing children's self-esteem and self-confidence:

- Do not focus on children's visual impairment only. Proactively identify and recognize the children's strengths and abilities in other areas and let them know they have plenty of qualities worthy of appreciation and attention.



- Do not feel too sorry for their loss due to visual impairment. Their life experience can be enriched by multi-sensory stimulation. Bring them to the beach, for instance, and let them hear the waves, smell the sea wind and the sand, feel the heat of the sunlight as well as the coolness of the sea water although they may not see the blue sky and the sea.
- Set reasonable goals with the children. While holding the expectations too high will bring pressure and frustration, the contrary will devoid them of challenges. Reasonable expectations and goals will be conducive to a sense of accomplishment, enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence. Parents can help them to breakdown problems into smaller tasks that can be solved by children themselves. When necessary, parents can lend a hand to help them.
- Avoid comparison with others. Children should be taught to compare with themselves and take pride in self-surpassing. Parents should also learn and teach their children that the process is more important than the outcome. After all, perseverance will bring success in the end. When praising a child, parents should avoid using clichés and state precisely how he or she does well with verbal encouragement.
- Meet children’s emotional needs and instil a sense of security inside them. Be a good listener and spend time to listen what they say about the ups and downs in their daily lives. Parents should describe more about what they are doing or going to do so as to communicate better with their children and make their children feel secure.
- Encourage children to participate actively in group activities to develop a sense of belonging. To begin with, they can have playdates with a few playmates, sharing common interests. Then, they can broaden the range of friendships or the kind of activities. Where necessary, guide them to explain to others about their visual limitations. Not only will this avoid misunderstanding but also make their visual impairment more acceptable to themselves and others.



Child Assessment Service, Department of Health
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government

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