
What is...

Cortical Visual Impairment

And what does it mean?

What is Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI)

Cortical visual impairment (CVI) comes from damage in areas of the brain that help someone know what they are seeing. Damage to these vision areas can happen when a child's brain is injured either while in the mom's womb, during birth, or after birth. The injury in the brain causes the child to not understand what they are seeing, so they may not look at people or toys since it does not make sense to their brain. Usually the children's eyes are working fine, but it is their brain that is having trouble. An example might be if you have poor eyesight, are hungry, tired, in the middle of a loud room, and you are taking a test on something you do not know much about... it would be very hard!

Red Flags

- Normal eye exam by eye doctor
- Medical history of injury to brain
- Behaviors that are not common of normal vision

Observed Behaviors

- Strong color preference
- Need for movement
- Extra time to look at things
- Prefers right or left side
- Busy and colorful places are stressful
- Looks at lights and lighted things
- Cannot see things far away
- Slow or no blink reflex
- Does not look at objects when grabbing them
- Prefers looking at familiar toys and objects

Does Vision Get Better?

Children with this visual problem usually are diagnosed by their eye doctor and then get early intervention services at home or school. Children who work with a vision therapist can work on building their vision to improve and strengthen the brain's ability to

understand what they are seeing. With good support from different therapy team members and their parents helping the child use vision every day, children with CVI can learn to use their vision.

What Next

It takes time! Be patient and ask questions - there are a lot of great resources on how to help your child learn to use their vision for learning and growing. Children who have regular vision therapy and practice using their vision daily can improve their vision in about 4 years¹. If you are unsure if your child has this or another vision problem talk to your doctor about seeing a developmental pediatric optometrist or ophthalmologist.

Vision Therapy

Often kids who have been diagnosed with a visual problem are referred to get vision therapy services through a teacher for the visually impaired. A major leader in helping with teaching and training for this vision disorder is Christine Roman-Lantzy and her book, "Cortical Visual Impairment: An Approach to Assessment and Intervention¹," has a lot of good information for parents and therapists working with these children.

Using Vision Daily

One of the most important things that can be done to support kids with this visual condition is to encourage them to use their vision many times during the day. It is important to find fun activities they are able to do and play with them every day. Other important things to consider are: if they are tired, hungry, in an uncomfortable position, having seizures often, or if they are on medicines making them very tired. All of these will make it harder for children to learn and understand what they are seeing, so choosing times of the day that are best for the child will help them learn and remember.

Useful Suggestions

- Keep room quiet to help your child focus
- Look at what your child is looking at - is it too colorful and busy?
- Simple (black) backgrounds are best
- 3D objects with one color are easier to see
- Use iPad Apps and/or computer games
- Wait - give your child more time to look

1. Roman-Lantzy, C. (2018). Cortical visual impairment: An approach to assessment and intervention. New York: AFB Press.