

## Why Are My Baby's Eyes So Important?

Vision is responsible for 80 to 90% of your child's early learning.



Photo from [What to Expect](#)

Vision is like a three-piece orchestra. The eye, the optic nerve, and the brain all need to work together harmoniously so your child can learn about and interact with their environment. According to experts, vision is also responsible for 80 to 90% of what your child learns during their first year. This means that if your child is having difficulty seeing clearly, their development can be affected.

In a typical baby the eye is the most developed organ of the body at birth, and it develops more quickly than any other immediately after birth. Although eyesight is still poor at this age, objects that move and are of high contrast stimulate vision development. The human face is ideally suited to attract and hold a baby's attention, and even from birth, sighted babies can imitate facial expressions and actions.

Over the next six months of a typical baby's life, a baby's visual system develops gradually. First, the eyes learn to focus and move together as a team to gather information. Then the brain steps in to process the visual information. The brain combines information received through

vision with information coming through the other senses (touch, hearing, taste, and smell) and awareness of the body's position in space.

With the development of eyesight comes the foundation for motor development such as crawling, walking, and hand-eye coordination. Babies begin to notice and understand all sorts of things in their everyday life – the voices of their parents, the texture of a toy or a blanket, the smell of milk and other foods, the feeling of moving arms and legs in space.

Babies who are blind or visually impaired don't automatically compensate for their lack of vision by developing their other senses. They need to be taught how to make sense of the information provided by the other senses, and what vision they do have needs to be maximized to its full potential.

The best place to encourage this development is in the home. Babies and toddlers learn best with familiar people in familiar environments – with their parents or caregivers, in a home or a community environment. Parents or caregivers are their first “teachers,” encouraging them to explore and make sense of their environment through play and daily routines.

If you suspect your baby has a visual impairment or your child has had a vision screening that indicates some concerns, schedule an appointment with a [pediatric ophthalmologist](#) right away. Once a diagnosis is confirmed, you can contact [Early Intervention Colorado](#) for services. These programs are at no cost and can provide therapies and support services tailored to your child's needs. This might include orientation and mobility training, development of social and daily living skills, and other specialized services.

You will be connected with an Early Intervention Teacher of the Visually Impaired (EI-TV I) who will work closely with your family in your home and other community settings to nurture the strengths of your child. An EI-TV I also does the following:

- They help families understand their child's specific visual diagnosis and the effect it will have on early learning.
- They teach caregivers strategies for interacting with their child and how to provide a variety of multi-sensory learning experiences for a child to gain access to the visual world.
- They model how children learn through play so families understand how to incorporate learning into everyday routines such as mealtime and bath time.
- They show parents how to foster emergent literacy through singing songs, storytelling, exposure to print, braille, and other pre-reading activities.
- When your child turns three, they help parents transition from early intervention, home-based services to school-based programming.

Most of all, an EI-TV I provides empowerment and support. As one parent commented after receiving services from A Shared Vision, “We are so thankful to have our teacher as a part of

our early intervention team! She is a wonderful resource and an even more wonderful person. Her insights and assistance have helped us learn how to best support our child while he learns to navigate the world.”