



KEEPING YOUR VISION IN SYNC

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One of the scariest things for me about this quarantine is the potential damage we are all doing to our visual systems by spending so much time inside, and so much time on our screens. We are limiting the ways we use our visual systems and ignoring the fact that our worlds extend past the distance from our eyes to our computers or iPads. It is especially detrimental to young children, whose visual systems are still developing. They are missing out on crucial opportunities for optimal vision development.

Vision plays a very significant role, often unrecognized, in becoming and being In Sync. Early visual skills emerge from strong tactile, vestibular, and proprioceptive sensory systems and continue to develop simultaneously with perceptual-motor skills—as long as we continue to move. Some essential visual processing skills are acuity, binocularity, and visual tracking.

The following is from my book, *Growing an In-Sync Child*, and may be helpful.

Acuity is the measurement of sight, most often represented by the ratio 20/20, which is considered perfect eyesight. A baby, however, comes into the world with a visual acuity of 20/200! This means he can see 10% as well as a person with perfect acuity. As he matures and begins to take an interest in objects at a closer range, his acuity should naturally stabilize at 20/20. Acuity is a measurement of sight only, and should not be confused with vision, which is

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the interpretation of what one sees. Some daily-life activities that require good acuity include:

- Recognizing letters and numbers
- Recognizing a friend's face
- Threading beads and lacing shoes
- Discriminating the corn in the succotash from the lima beans
- Sorting buttons

Binocularity is the ability to use both eyes together. This is crucial for depth perception. Any activity that encourages bilateral coordination also reinforces binocularity. You may see a child with poor binocularity lay his head on the desk or on his arm while reading or writing. When doing this, he is using only one eye to see. This habit should always be discouraged. Some daily-life skills that require efficient binocularity include:

- Playing hopscotch
- Judging distances
- Running accurately toward a target
- Holding one's head straight rather than tilting it to one side
- Stepping onto an escalator

Visual tracking is the ability to watch a moving target using only the eyes, with no head movement. Visual tracking develops as the infant begins to watch moving things such as a mobile or a parent. A child with poor visual tracking may frequently lose her place while reading, may reverse words, and may have mid-line crossing issues as the eyes fail to move smoothly from left to right (or right to left). Some daily-life skills that require efficient visual tracking include:

- Reading a sentence in a book
- Reading from the chalkboard
- Reading sheet music

- Playing ball sports
- Avoiding getting hit by a moving swing or car

(From Growing an In-Sync Child, pp 17-20)

Here are several activities that promote good vision development.

Look at My Hand

When handing something to your child, or when taking something from her, always be sure she LOOKS at your hand. Encouraging her to LOOK at what she is doing teaches her to use her eyes to direct her movements, while simultaneously improving her tracking skills. When you hand Sandra a toy, don't just put it in her hand. Rather, move the toy here and there a couple of times until she looks at what she is taking. When she gives you a toy, don't just take it from her; rather, move your hand here and there to make her LOOK at the toy's destination. Make it fun! “

How Many Steps?

This is a terrific exercise to do outside or even inside with a visual target such as a beanbag. Ask your child to look at an object like a tree or a parked car. Tell him that the game is to estimate (or “to guess”) how many steps it will take for him to walk to the tree, making sure all his steps are the same size. After he gives an estimate, ask him to walk to the tree while counting his steps. You can change this around by asking him how many jumps ... hops ... tiptoe steps ...

I Spy

Play this game as often as possible, finding objects that are various distances from your child. Having him look farther away than the distance between his eyes and his screen is a great way to keep his visual system active.

Obstacle Courses

You don't need a long driveway in order to make an exciting obstacle course. It's possible to even create one inside. Follow these simple guidelines:

- Alternate over and under obstacles

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- Think of prepositions: over, under, around, through, between, in, out
- Use various directions (walk backwards on this line, move sideways across this board)
- Use various forms of locomotion (jump, hop, slide, tiptoe)

Flashlights

Flashlights were invented for making children giggle. They are also highly effective for enhancing visual skills. Use them in any of these fun ways:

- Outdoors, once it's dark enough, shine a light quickly on an object. Hold it there for only a few seconds. Ask your child to identify the object you illuminated. Switch and let your child shine the light on something. The further away, the better for counteracting all that close visual screen work.
- Shine your light on a spot on the floor and ask your child to jump on it. Depending on your child's temperament, quickly move the light away (most children will giggle) or let your child rest there prior to your moving the light to a different spot.
- Give your child a second flashlight and ask her to shine her light on yours as your light makes a slow path along the ceiling or the wall.

During this time of quarantine, while we are all dependent on our screens, please encourage your children to move, look and see, so that when they can finally move through the world again freely, they will have In-Sync visual systems to help them navigate their way. ■



JOYE NEWMAN was the founder and director of Kids Moving Company, which provides individual perceptual motor therapy to people ranging in age from 2 to 60 years. Currently, in addition to seeing private clients, she offers workshops to teachers and parents in perceptual motor development, creative movement, and reading readiness. Joye is a founding member of WISER, and served as the original Education Chair. Her other professional affiliations

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include AAHPER, NAEYC and CEC. Joye co-authored the highly acclaimed book, *Growing an In-Sync Child: Simple, Fun Activities to Help Every Child Develop, Learn, and Grow*, and the *In Sync Activity Card Book* with her good friend, Carol Kranowitz.