Sensory Questionnaire

Sense of Vision

Greater Glasgow and Clyde

This series of Sensory Questionnaires are designed to enable you to check your child's progress at particular stages of development.

YOUR SENSE OF VISION

We use our vision to interpret information from all we see around us. Some children use their vision differently and can either be more sensitive to visual input (e.g. avoiding bright lights) or less sensitive (e.g. appearing not to see something right in front of them).

If you suspect your child does not process visual information as well as they should please complete the following questionnaire and then try using the downloadable strategies to help them.

If you have concerns about your child's ability to see things properly please take them to an optician for an eye test.

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Question 1 - Visual (2 - 5 Years)

Question 1

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Does your child like to look at spinning/moving objects such as washing machines, wheels, fans etc.? Does your child spin or flick objects in front of their eyes?

Some children may twirl pencils, flap pieces of paper, or even flick their fingers in front of their eyes. Likewise children can spin toys (even toys not designed for spinning) or spend ages watching the washing machine in spin cycle because they enjoy the visual stimulation so much.

Strategies and Suggestions

Whilst children can use spinning objects as a form of visual stimulation, your sense of vision and your sense of movement (vestibular system) work very closely together. Don't assume that because your child spins things in front of their eyes it is for the visual experience. Try the following strategies to see if they help:

- Watching spinning things can be almost hypnotic. Allow your child access to spinning toys for time limited periods regularly throughout the day. Have a selection of spinning tops and other visually stimulating toys that your child can choose to use during these periods.

- Introduce spinning items outside such as windmills and hanging wind spirals to encourage your child to play outdoors.

- Use movement to see if this decreases your child's need to fixate on spinning objects. Use a spinning chair or a "sit'n'spin" to enable your child to achieve the same sensory input in a different fashion.

- Some children find holding their toys closely to their eye helps them to filter out any irrelevant information and focus on what is important to them.

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Is your child attracted to bright lights and shiny objects?

Is it difficult to move your child away from the window because they are caught up in watching the raindrops or dust motes floating in the sun? Do they seek out reflective surfaces and love playing with shiny paper? If so, answer 'yes' to this question.

Strategies and Suggestions

Enjoying bright and shiny things is only a problem if it prevents your child from participating in other activities. If they become so fixated on specific items that they cannot be moved on to something else try the following strategies to help:

- To help your child fixate less on bright and shiny things have a look at the home environment and try to reduce the amount of visual stimulus in the rooms where they spend most time. Think about using more subdued lighting or putting up a blind at the window.

- If you are completing this questionnaire as a nursery worker; consider what in the nursery setting is distracting for the child. Can there be one room or a corner of a room where there is less visual clutter? For example no dangling mobiles or sparkly wall decorations. Can the child use this corner when you are trying to engage them in an activity that requires concentration?

- If you are completing this questionnaire as either a parent or a nursery worker; make up a sensory box consisting of motivating visual toys. These could include light up spinning toys, a string of sparkly beads etc. Allow the child to choose a small visual toy from their sensory box, to play with during timetabled 'sensory breaks' either in nursery or at home. For more information on creating a sensory box click here.

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Does your child avoid eye contact with you?

Some children find eye contact difficult due to visual sensitivities, as a moving face can be a lot of visual information for the brain to process. Other children do not appreciate the importance of giving eye contact as a social cue and need additional support to master this skill.

Strategies and Suggestions

Some children find eye contact difficult due to visual sensitivities, as a moving face can be a lot of visual information for the brain to process. Other children do not appreciate the importance of giving eye contact as a social cue and need additional support to master this skill.

- Do not insist on eye contact all the time as this can be very uncomfortable for some children, however if asking your child a direct question ask them to look at you first e.g. "Darren... look at me...do you want a drink?"
- Use sunglasses to reduce sensitivity if your child is visually sensitive.
- We know that when a child is taking part in movement their ability to give eye contact is better so interaction combined with vestibular (movement) activities e.g. dancing to music, sitting on a swing, bouncing on a trampette or therapy ball, or moving along to an action nursery rhyme, can all help improve eye contact.

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Does your child recognise their own reflection in a mirror?

As strange as this may seem, some children do not realise that their reflection is their own. This is a developmental stage so before the age of 2 (either chronological, or cognitively if your child had a global delay) they would not be expected to recognise themselves.

Strategies and Suggestions

Children only start recognising themselves in a mirror from age of 2; before this they realise that there is another child there but not necessarily that it is them. If your child does not appear to be aware that their reflection is their own then spend some time each day doing the following:

- Stand facing your child, next to a mirror. Point to yourself and say who you are e.g. 'mummy', then point to your child and say their name. Repeat a couple of times then get your child to do the same. Turn so you are both facing the mirror. Point to your own reflection and say who you are, then point to your child's reflection and say their name. Once again get your child to copy you.

- When you are out with your child repeat this process whenever you can see your reflection, e.g. shop windows, mirrors, shiny surfaces in lifts etc. This will help reinforce your child's understanding and awareness.

Question 5 - Visual (2 - 5 Years)

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Does your child prefer bright fast moving TV programmes?

Rapidly moving images are visually very stimulating, and can become quite addictive! Hence the reason older children like to spend lots of time in front of computer screens. Children tend to become absorbed in TV programmes, and can also often be observed viewing them from odd angles e.g. lying upside down of the sofa, or on their side on the floor. It is important to keep the amount of time your child spends in front of a screen limited to about an hour each day (easier said than done if it gives you the chance to make dinner or grab a shower) as we don't yet understand the long term implications of too much of this type of visual stimulus on the child's developing brain.

Strategies and Suggestions

- Try to encourage your child to take part in more active pursuits such as rough and tumble games, and outdoor based activities.
- Avoid strobe lighting, especially those that flicker, as this can have a similar effect on your child's brain as watching a highly pixelated screen.
- Create a visual sensory box (click here for ideas) and allow your child to access this for time limited periods throughout the day. Use a clock or timer to limit the amount of time your child gets to spend in this activity. You may find the use of a visual timetable or picture cards can help you support introducing this as part of your child's daily routine.

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Does your child stare intensely at people and objects?

Normally we look at people and then look away. Even when we are talking to somebody it is unusual to maintain unbroken eye contact; we do look more when we are listening but would still give a cursory glance to other people or objects in our surroundings. Some children however appear to stare at you beyond the point of comfort. If your child appears to fixate on faces or objects to this degree then respond 'yes' to this question.

Strategies and Suggestions

- Your child does not mean to stare and is not being rude, however they may need adult support to stop looking and focus back on something else or to the task in hand.

- Your child may not hear you calling their name when they are intently focused on something. You may need to get in close to catch their attention and help them move away from the object or person in question.

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Can your child be startled when being approached suddenly?

Does your child seem surprised each time you approach them from behind? Do they get upset or jump when their name is called?

Strategies and Suggestions

Children can get a surprise if they are approached suddenly, especially if they are not processing visual information as quickly as the rest of us. They can become quite upset or angry when this happens so please be aware of this when you are walking up to them.

- Avoid approaching the child from behind if at all possible.
- Combine sound with vision, so say their name as you approach them.
- When approaching them move towards them slowly, say their name clearly and try and approach them from the front or side rather than from behind.

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Is your child very cautious when moving (walking/crawling) between two different floor coverings e.g. when carpet joins kitchen lino?

Some children do not recognise that a change in floor surface is not a change in level. You and I might know that walking through a doorway from a room with a wooden floor into a room with a carpet does not involve going up or down a step but children who do not process visual information properly may think there is a change in level so may stop to step cautiously over the threshold.

Strategies and Suggestions

This visual processing skill is known as 'depth perception' and is how your eyes provide your brain with information about how deep stairs or kerbsides are, so that you can step over and around things safely.

- It is ok to hold your child's hand as they move across thresholds. They need the additional security and support of an adult until their brain learns to process depth perception properly.
- It may be appropriate to invest in a plain carpet runner to cross over the thresholds between rooms that your child struggles to step over. This will give the child a clear visual message about where to walk.
- Using 'stick on footprints' can also help the child to understand that both sides of a change in flooring are at the same level.

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Is your child easily distracted by nearby visual stimuli e.g. pictures, items on walls, windows or other people moving around?

Some children struggle to concentrate in a busy room. It can be hard to focus your attention on your nursery teacher if you are fascinated by the murals or wall and window displays, or continue to look at the person talking to you if the TV is playing in the corner. Whilst mild distraction is fairly common, particularly amongst younger children, as a child matures they should be able to focus on the person talking to them or the book they should be reading without being side-tracked by other visual information around them.

Strategies and Suggestions

- It is important to minimise visual stimulation for the child that is overwhelmed by all they see. This can mean making their bedroom a low stimulus room by keeping pictures and toys to a minimum, or using opaque window film or blinds on a window.
- It is also important to keep visual distractions to a minimum when you are trying to calm a child down, which is why low lighting and low sensory stimulus bedrooms are necessary for a good night's sleep.
- Give the child a quiet space they can retreat to e.g. a 'pop up tent' space or a quiet corner in nursery where the walls are blank and visual information is kept to a minimum.