

number: Some of a child's most important learning takes place in the first years. A vision loss may affect your child's development. If you are concerned about your child's vision, it is important to work with someone who can answer your questions and help you locate the specialized services your family needs.

Infants and toddlers use all their senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch) to explore their world and develop important learning skills. For most young children, playing with toys, learning to crawl and walk, and building relationships are as a natural part of development.

Children who have a vision loss or impairment, early identification, treatment, and educational intervention is crucial to meet the needs of their unique learning needs. If a child is blind or visually impaired, certain aspects of his/her development (such as social and motor skills) may be affected.

Specialized services are available to help parents learn how to teach your child to explore the environment, to create opportunities for learning, and to stimulate your child's development.

At these ages, he/she should:

**0-6 months:**

- show interest in or stare at a light source
- "fixate" (focus) on a brightly colored object held about three feet from his or her face
- "track" (follow) a slowly moving, brightly colored object left-to-right
- appear to react to a familiar face

**6-12 months:**

- look at his/her own hands or at toys he/she is holding
- follow the movement of an adult across the room
- reach for objects out of reach
- recognize and respond to familiar adults

**12-18 months:**

- show interest in tiny objects
- locate objects across the room and move to them
- show interest in picture books
- look at scribbles made with a crayon

**18-36 months:**

- begin to complete simple shape formboards and puzzles
- recognize and label familiar pictures
- point to smaller features on pictures
- have smoother eye-hand coordination (reach is accurate, is able to place objects in containers)

**Behaviors** which may be signs of vision loss:

- Child presses his/her eyes with hands or toys
- Child frequently rubs eyes
- Child looks at things by tilting head in an unusual position
- Child's eyes move in an unusual way

**High risk conditions** associated with visual impairment:

Albinism  
Amblyopia  
Aniridia  
Cataracts  
Cerebral Palsy  
CHARGE  
Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI)  
Coloboma  
Cytomegalovirus (CMV)  
Down Syndrome  
Farsightedness  
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome  
Glaucoma  
Leber's Amaurosis  
Marfan's Syndrome  
Nearsightedness  
Nystagmous  
Optic Glioma  
Optic Nerve Hypoplasia  
Retinal Detachment  
Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP)  
Retinitis Pigmentosa  
Retinoblastoma  
Rett's Syndrome  
Rubella  
Strabismus (eye turn)  
Toxoplasmosis  
Visual Field Defect

If you are concerned about your child's skills, have your child's vision checked by an ophthalmologist.

## If You Have Concerns About Your Child's Development, There Is Help Available

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### What is Early Intervention?

Early Intervention is a program sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) that helps parents of children birth to three to recognize and understand their child's particular developmental needs, and teaches them ways to help their child grow. The Early Intervention team works with the family. Together they determine what type of services would be most beneficial, and put together an **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**. The IFSP specifies all the education, training and support services your family will receive to best help their child.

**Specialized services for a child with vision loss can be part of your IFSP.**

### **Services of the Visually Impaired**

provide instruction in the use of vision such as daily routines as play, feeding, communication, motor and learning tasks. They develop activities and adaptations to help your child use his/her vision as effectively as possible. They can teach sensory skills (such as the use of touch or hearing) and help you understand how vision loss may affect your child's development. They may consult with other service providers such as doctors or therapists.

### **Orientation and Mobility Specialists**

explain the effects of visual impairments on a child's motor and movement skills. They help children develop the skills they need to move independently and safely in their daily environment.

**Ophthalmologists** provide medical diagnosis, monitor eye health, measure visual acuity and prescribe corrective lenses as appropriate. They are medical professionals who can prescribe medication and perform surgical procedures.

**Optometrists** measure visual acuity and provide general eye exams for vision correction, low vision assessment and options for low vision aids.

development will work with your family and your Early Intervention Program and can provide:

- Low Vision Assessment
- Functional Vision Assessment
- Developmental Assessment
- Orientation and Mobility Assessment and Services
- Parent-to-parent support
- Direct Services
- Consultation and collaboration with other service providers
- Help in planning for the transition to preschool

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### **Who Can Help and How?**

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) can provide you with information about specialized programs and services, advocacy, and case management for children with visual impairments. Call the Children's Services Division at 800-848-8867 (voice) or 800-392-6556 (TTY).

Website: [www.state.ma.us/mcb](http://www.state.ma.us/mcb)

Talk with your Early Intervention Program about accessing these services. If you are not already enrolled in an Early Intervention Program, call the *Central Directory for Early Intervention* at 800-905-8437 (voice) or 617-624-5992 (TTY) to find an Early Intervention Program in your community.

There is an Annual Service Fee for Early Intervention that is based on family size and income. It ranges from \$0 to \$250 per year. Early Intervention services are supported by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, MassHealth, and health insurance companies.

Case management services through the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind are provided at no cost to families.

# Do you think your child has vision loss?



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