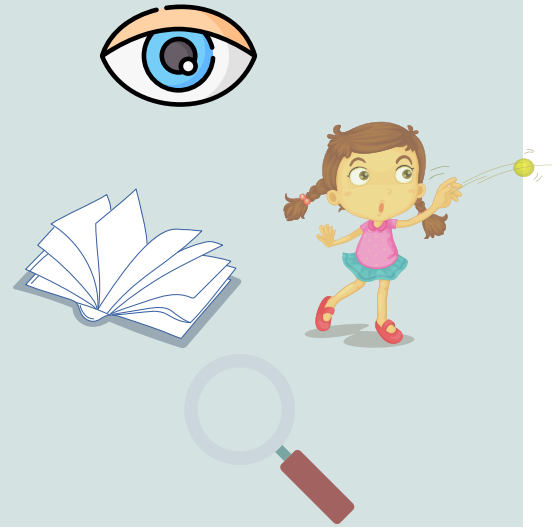


# Visual Skills

## Why are Visual Skills Important?

When we talk about visual skills, we are going to focus mainly on how we process the things that we see in our environment (**visual perception**), how our eye muscles work together to help us attend to important things (**oculomotor skills**), and how we coordinate our eyes and movements to accomplish everyday tasks (**visual motor integration**)!

Visual skills are so important to complete all of our occupations! We need them to **process** where we are in relation to other people or things so we can **navigate** in a safe way, to **find** what we are looking for in a kitchen cabinet, to **read** and understand the different shapes and forms of letters, to **track** a ball when playing sports, and so much more!



## Types of Visual Skills

### Oculomotor Skills:

- **Visual tracking**-Ability to accurately track moving objects with our eyes
- **Saccades**- A quick, simultaneous movement where both eyes work to switch focus between objects
- **Convergence/divergence**-The ability to adjust our eyes to look at things both close up and far away

### Visual Perceptual Skills:

- **Visual discrimination**- The ability to recognize similarities and differences between objects based on size, color, shapes, etc.
- **Form Constancy**-The ability to know that a form or shape is the same even if the position shape, size, color or location is different.
- **Visual memory**- Being able to remember something you have seen before
- **Visual sequential memory**-Being able to remember something that you have seen in the same order that you saw it.
- **Visual Closure**-Being able to recognize or understand an object even when the entirety of it is not seen.
- **Visual spatial relations**-Being able to understand the relationships of objects within the environment.
- **Visual figure ground**- Being able to locate something within a busy or cluttered environment

### Visual Motor Integration Skills:

- This is how we coordinate what we see and the way we move about to respond to a demand or accomplish a task

# Visual Challenges in Everyday Life

Ok, so we know visual skills are important for participation in everyday life. How do we know that these challenges may be present within our own kiddos? While not an exhaustive list, below are a few things that may point to visual challenges in children.

- A baby who may not reach for toys, transfer objects between their hands, or coordinate movements to accomplish a task such as crawling
- A baby or toddler who may not point to objects in the environment as a means of communication
- For children who are able to verbally communicate, we can pay attention if they state that their eyes are hurting, or their eyes are tired, or things look blurry
- When a child covers one eye or squints it can be a sign of fatigue
- Does your child often run into objects or people around them
- Does your child have trouble making smooth, precise movements when reaching or grasping objects?
- Do you notice the rate at which your child is able to focus or complete table top tasks to be slow?
- Does the child often miss things or make mistakes during academic tasks?
- How are the size, shape, and form of written shapes or letters?

## How can we support these skills?

We know that oculomotor skills, visual perceptual skills, and visual motor integration skills are an essential component of participation and enjoyment in everyday life. While this is still an emerging research topic, there is research that supports the use of visual interventions to increase performance in self care and academic tasks. Below are examples of how we can support these skills at home and in the classroom.

- Encourage your babies to take part in tummy time if they are medically able. This encourages visual perceptual skills and exploration of the environment
- Motivate your baby to crawl to further establish visual motor integration skills
- Provide your child with toys of different colors, shapes, and sizes to explore
- Play with balloons and bubbles to facilitate visual tracking, visual perception, saccadic movements, and visual motor integration skills.
- Encourage play with balls (rolling, catching throwing, baseball, soccer, tennis, etc.) to address a multitude of visual skills
- Work puzzles with your children to address visual perceptual skills and problem solving
- Games like *Spotit*, *Eyespy*, and *Wheres Waldo* are great for visual scanning and figure ground skills.
- Memory and matching games are great for visual memory skills

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