Assessment of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired

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Psychologist Responsibilities

- Possess knowledge of psychological and sociological aspects of blindness.
- Possess knowledge of performance implications of blindness.
- Use assessment instruments appropriate for the blind.
- Assess intellectual, psychosocial, adaptive behavior, and social/emotional skills.
- Provide group, individual, and family counseling.

Developmental Impact

- May affect early motor milestones.
- Normal language development is expected.
- Academic development may require special materials.
  - Large print, magnifying aids, closed-circuit TV, books on tape.
- Social development may need to be encouraged.
  - The blind child may feel isolated and tends to withdraw.
**Pre-Assessment Considerations**

- **Understand the Vision Loss**
  - Type and Degree (corrected)
    - Review/Request a Functional Vision Assessment.
    - The learning potential of many visually impaired students can be assessed using traditional techniques (with minor adaptations, e.g., enlarged materials).
    - Make sure vision has been recently assessed and if helpful glasses are worn/visual aids are used!

**Source:** NICHCY Disability Fact Sheet – No.13

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- **Understand the Vision Loss**
  - Partially sighted
  - Low vision
  - Legally blind
  - Totally blind

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- **Understand the Vision Loss**
  - Etiology
    - May suggest the presence of other handicaps (e.g., birth trauma is also associated with learning disabilities).
    - Systemic conditions (e.g., hypertension, cerebrovascular, vitamin A deficiency)
    - Specific eye conditions (e.g., Macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma, Diabetes Mellitus, myopia, Retinitis Pigmentosa, eye injuries, tumors)
Pre-Assessment Considerations

- Use modifications suggested by the functional vision assessment.
  - As indicated adjust lighting.
  - Allow child to use (and adjust) visual aids.
- Use standardized procedures when appropriate.
  - If low vision is suspected to be affecting performance, then modify administration.
    - e.g., re-administer with stimulus items enlarged.
    - Always note such modifications (practice effect may influence performance).
- Budget more time for these assessments
  - When done well they are much more involved.
  - Seeing contributes to fatigue and will require frequent breaks.

School Record Review

- Vision screening results.
- School attendance history.
- Prior assessment data.
- Academic performance.
- Family information.

During Testing

- Explain what is being done.
  - e.g., putting away/taking out test materials.
- Account for fatigue.
- Use spoken language to reinforce non-verbal cues.
Observations

- Will help in determining
  - needed test accommodations.
  - typical behavior/performance.
  - learning strengths and weaknesses.

Assessment Tools

- Use standardized procedures when appropriate.
- Use tests designed for visually impaired.
- Modify existing measures.
- Employ verbal tests.
- Unless tests are known to be valid for this population, always consider the possibility that scores may be underestimates.
- If possible avoid timed tests as they tend to penalize the blind student.
  - Large print and magnifying devices take longer to use.

Intelligence Testing

- If a child has useable vision for schoolwork, then use traditional procedures.
- If test failures are suspected to be related to low vision, then accommodate.
  - Failures following appropriate modifications can be attributed to ability.
- Wechsler Verbal Scales
  - Special cards with raised drawings may be needed on arithmetic.
- Columbia Mental Maturity Scale
  - Large figures.
- Pictorial Test of Intelligence
  - Stimulus cards are dark outline drawings.
  - Easel presentation assists scanning.
Social & Emotional

- An essential element of all assessments.
  - Questionnaires and Checklists.
  - Projective Techniques.
  - Parent Interview Scales.
- Adaptive behavior.
  - Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale
- Many items require vision and as a result blind children may be penalized.

Resources

- Program Guidelines for Students who are Visually Impaired (Rev. Edition). (CDE, 1997).
  - On reserve in the Reserve Book Room.
- California School for the Blind (California School for the Blind, Outreach Services, 900 Walnut Avenue, Fremont, CA 94536, 510-794-3800 extension 210)
  - The Professional Resource Center is available to the public. This center serves as a concentrated resource library for people researching an issue regarding visual impairments. Everything from current regulations to a parent network can be found in this center.
  - Assessment Services are available to visually impaired, deaf-blind and visually impaired/multi-handicap students in public school programs throughout the school year. Referrals are made by local school districts, county offices of education, and Special Education Local Plan Areas.

Resources

- American Foundation for the Blind
  - http://www.afb.org/
- National Eye Institute
- JAMA
  - http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/290/15/2088
- MedlinePlus
- NICHCY Fact Sheet - Visual Impairments
Next Week

- Read Thomas & Grimes, Chapter 97
- Recommended Reading
- Severe Physical Handicaps group project/lecture due