

Children with Cerebral Visual Impairment

Home Strategies for Younger Child (4-8 years)

The following strategies are suggestions to try out for some of the identified problem areas, for your child at school and at home.

It is important to remember that what works for one person may not work for others and that if a strategy works well initially it may not last and may require to be adapted or changed in the future.

It is important to prioritise a few problem areas and implement one or two strategies. Trying to tackle all areas of difficulty and implement all solutions at one time can result in overload and ultimately will not be beneficial.

The following information outlines some of the key areas of difficulty identified from the clinical structured history taking questionnaire and some of the strategies which may be effective for each problem.

Impaired visual field or visual perception affecting vision affecting movement

Difficulties in this area can be due to impairment in the visual field especially lower visual field or left/ right visual fields.

Difficulties in this area can also be due to difficulty with depth perception resulting in problems seeing and adjusting to uneven surfaces, changes in the floor surfaces, edges of pavements or kerbs, or the ability to see objects on the floor surface if it is patterned or cluttered. The child therefore does not adjust their movements accordingly and is increasingly likely to hesitate, stumble, trip or fall.

1. Trip over toys and obstacles on the floor

Strategies to try

- Keep floor surfaces clear
- Try using a scooter, pram or wheeled toy to push to provide additional input about the surface and to increase stability and provides tactile guidance about the height of the ground ahead and reinforces the efference copy map (the brain's ability to locate items when assisted by touch).
- Try using a stick (hockey stick, self selected stick from the park) to help guide around obstacles

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- Use additional supports to negotiate obstacles i.e. wall, adult.
- Try plain floor surfaces i.e. plain carpets, laminate floors to highlight contrast.
- Develop good storage systems and routines to avoid clutter and obstacles on the floor.
- Develop coordination and balance skills through physical activities and games. i.e. obstacle courses in park, house, garden, riding, swimming, trampolining

2. Has difficulty walking down stairs

Strategies to try

- Use additional tactile referencing and physical support, i.e. hand rails at the correct height, adult to hold.
- Highlight the edges of the stairs with bright colours or dots in the middle of the stair.
- Colour mark beyond the top and bottom of the stairs to emphasis start and finish.
- Give additional verbal reminders to slow down/ hold on to hand rails
- Use bright lighting or spot lighting on stairs, especially top, bottom and landing.
- Use a torch at night
- Try plain covering on stairs, i.e. plain carpets, laminate or wood (patterns cause distractions and can act as obstacles)
- Minimise wall decorations and patterned paper
- Encourage use of lifts/ moving stairs if available.

3. Trips at the edge of pavements going up

Strategies to try

- Give additional verbal reminders “there is a kerb to go up in 3 steps”
- Give additional physical support i.e. arm (this should be held straight and slightly back to give appropriate guidance of changes in height.)
- Use pedestrian crossings where kerbs stones are reduced in height.

4. Trips at the edge of pavements going down

Strategies to try

- Give additional verbal reminders “there is a kerb to go down in 3 steps”
- Give additional support i.e. arm
- Use pedestrian crossings where kerb stones are reduced in height.

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5. Appears to get stuck at the top of a slide/hill

Strategies to try

- Give verbal reminders to look down
- Practice on small slides initially until confidence is increased.
- Give additional adult support.

6. Looks down or trips when crossing floor boundaries e.g. where lino meets carpet

Strategies to try

- Give additional verbal reminders and prompts i.e. the carpet finishes here.
- Try plain carpets and floor surfaces, but contrast colour or highlight where there is a boundary change i.e. change from lino to carpet.
- Have good lighting at the boundary areas
- Try a picture or symbol at eye level to reinforce the location of the boundary.
- Mark floor boundaries clearly
- Avoid the use of patterned carpets.
- Try using a push toy, tennis racquet or hockey stick to trail while walking.
- Develop balance and coordination skills through play, games and leisure activities.

7. Leaves food on the near or far side of the plate

Strategies to try

- Position favourite foods on the area that is usually forgotten.
- Give verbal reminders to rotate the plate.
- Try plate on a spinning base.
- Try using plain plates.
- Place different foods on different plates.
- Ensure there is a contrast of colour and type of food on plate to increase visibility.

8. Leaves food on the right or left side of their plate

Strategies to try

- Give additional verbal reminders "remember to look to the right and the left"
- Try placing favourite foods on the neglected side of the plate

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- Develop a routine including rotation of the plate- either with verbal reminders or a visual timer i.e. egg timer / cooking clock / stop watch.
- Try plate on a rotating base.
- Contrast colours and types of foods
- Lay foods in a line across plate
- Lay each food item out separately
- Avoid gravy and sauces which can merge the appearance of food.

9. Has difficulty finding the beginning of a line when reading

Strategies to try

- Try finger pointing.
- Try a window marker.
- Try using a magnifying glass or magnifying acetates.
- Establish the font size and word per page and line that is easiest for the child work with (not the smallest they can read), and ensure that work is provided in this size
- Make an individualised work book with the beginning of each line highlighted, bold or in a contrasting colour.
- Try holding a ruler vertically down the page to show where the start position is.
- Try an elevated book stand for reading.

10. Has difficulty finding the next word when reading

Strategies to try

- Try finger pointing
- Try a tilted work station
- Mask off additional text
- Cover text that has been read with card or the back of hand.
- Break text into small bits
- Minimise the amount of visual information presented i.e. enlarge the font size, try double line spacing, try double word spacing.

11. Walks out in front of traffic

Strategies to try

- Give additional verbal reminders “we must wait here until we check it is safe to cross.
- Teach to cross only at pedestrian crossings
- Encourage to rely on sound more than vision to listen for cars.
- Train to turn whole body from side to side- this can be assisted by parents’ role modelling these actions.

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12. Bumps into door frames or partly open doors

Strategies to try

- Highlight door frames in a contrasting colour
- Replace doors with beaded curtains
- Give additional time to become familiar with a new environment, arrive early to explore.
- Use contrasts in colour and brightness of walls and floors to emphasise where they start and finish.
- Paint skirting boards and door frames a contrasting colour from walls and floor to facilitate it standing out.

13 Misses pictures or words on one side of a page

Strategies to try

- Use finger pointing.
- Try using window markers.
- Try printing text vertically.
- Give additional verbal reminders to scan.
- Try displacing text to area of visual field.
- Try using a vertical book stand.
- Try making an individualised book by scanning and enlarging text, and or using photographs of familiar people or objects to reinforce the text.

Difficulties showing evidence of impaired perception of movement

These difficulties indicate that there is a problem with the information being received and processed when the eyes move or when objects in the environment move. The individual may misjudge their own movements through space but may also demonstrate fear or panic if they are surprised by moving objects approaching them unexpectedly. For example; children in a playground, dog in the park, a car: as they will not have tracked or seen the object move.

14. Has difficulty seeing scenery from a moving vehicle

Strategies to try

- Give additional verbal information and guidance “there is a church coming up on your left”

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- Try wrap around sunglasses to help reduce the additional movement experience and visual input.

15. Has difficulty seeing things which are moving quickly, such as small animals, other children, or liquid filling a cup.

Strategies to try

- Give additional verbal information “your friend Jenny is at the gate in a pink jacket”
- Ensure friends and teachers introduce themselves if approaching in a busy areas where there is a lot of movement
- Ensure additional assistance both verbal and physical is offered to help find friends/ family in busy places i.e. playground.
- Encourage child to rely on voice recognition to locate friends and family.
- Teach child to track by using exaggerated head movements.

When filling cups, or pouring

- Try using a clear plastic cup- this can be marked with nail polish to indicate the full level.
- Learn to fill cup half full and count seconds while liquid is pouring having had supervised practice regarding the counting time.
- Try using a fluid indicator.
- Teach child to listen to the pitch as the cup/glass is filled. A cup filling will emit a higher pitch as it is filled.

16.Avoids watching fast moving TV

Strategies to try

- Vary size of screen to suit the child’s scanning capacity.
- Sit close to the TV to minimise other visual distractions.
- Minimise the visual distractions around the TV. i.e. photos, pictures, patterned wall coverings.
- Generally, older films (pre 1970) e.g. Wizard of Oz have less sophisticated graphics and camera movements and zoom photography and will be slower moving and therefore more easily seen.

17. Chooses to watch slow moving TV

Strategies to try

- Generally, older films (pre 1970) e.g. Wizard of Oz have less sophisticated graphics and camera movements, and zoom photography and will be slower moving and therefore more easily seen.
- Find programmes where the presenter sits or stands still (children’s news, weather)

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18. Has difficulty catching a ball

Strategies to try

- Practice catching skills using a balloon which will move more slowly.
- Try filling the balloon with rice / water to give additional sound clues.
- Try using large brightly coloured balls
- Try using balls with sound or light effects.

Difficulty interpreting a complex visual scene and making sense of the information when too much visual information is present

This can be due to the overwhelming visual impact of too much information being presented at the one time. Difficulty searching for and locating specific items, people, or places can also depend on the amount of visual information, the additional movement visible and the orientation and view of the object.

Poor visual memory and the ability to retain information presented visually may also impact on performance.

Orientation of self around the environment is also a challenge especially if there is a lot of visual information to interpret and to process.

19. Has difficulty seeing something which is pointed out in the distance

Strategies to try

- Play 'eye spy' games encouraging the child to select a distant object and give clues about it so that others have to find and identify (could use a video camera).
- Train to regularly scan the visual scene and describe what they can see.
- Give extra time to process information and do not rush on too quickly.
- Take child to the item to view at a closer proximity.

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20. Has difficulty finding a close friend or relative who is standing in a group. i.e. Mum at school gate, friend in the playground, Dad at a party.

Strategies to try

- Give additional verbal cues e.g. mum calls out name to allow voice recognition to assist with visual scanning
- Have a pre determined meeting place so that the child knows where to look for person
- Ensure “pop out” visible and easily identifiable clothing is worn e.g. a bright pink jumper, a luminous jacket. This item must be worn so that it is visible from all angles. i.e. a jumper , not a badge. The child should be aware of this.
- Encourage the use of voice recognition skills
- Encourage child to shout/ call for person.
- Ensure close family friends use non-verbal signs which are easily visible to help them be located i.e. waving.
- Team sports are likely to be difficult for the child as they will not necessarily be able to find their team members especially if there are a lot of people and every one is moving.

21. Has difficulty finding an item they want if there is too much visual information i.e. biscuits in the cupboard, toy in a box/on a shelf.

Strategies to try

- Set up an area in the individual’s room for storage of important items i.e. bedside table with storage box, plate.
- Reduce the amount of visual information available i.e the number of toys in a toy box, the number of items on a shelf.

22. Get lost in places where there is a lot to see e.g. a crowded shop. (may also refuse to leave parents side for fear of getting lost)

Strategies to try

- Have a pre arranged meeting point in case of getting lost.
- Ensure child always stays close to the adult they are with, or always knows where the adult will be – the adult may have to stand in an agreed position to allow the child to instantly be able to locate them.
- Practice to develop familiarity and consistency

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23. Gets lost in places which are well known and which are new.

Strategies to try

- Try using coloured markers on the floor i.e. circles, foot print shapes to help with route finding.
- Encourage the use of land markers – pictures, photographs on the wall, counting doors with a memory map.
- Use mnemonic memory strategies to help route finding by recounting land marks.
- Encourage child to shout/ call for person.
- Ensure close family friends use non-verbal signs which are easily visible to help them be located i.e. waving.
- Memorise route instructions setting them to a rhythm or music

24. Has difficulty locating an item of clothing in a pile of clothes, a drawer or a wardrobe.

Strategies to try

- Minimise clothes in the drawer or cupboard i.e. socks only
- Experiment with storage styles and layout e.g. vertical / horizontal
- Try hanging clothes by outfit rather than items.
- Spotlight key areas in room i.e. above drawers
- Involve child in storage and organisation
- Lay out clothes the night before
- Hang clothes rather than fold them
- Try an elevated shoe rack
- Practice dressing skills a little at a time with help at the start of a garment and then child completes the last bit.

25. Has difficulty selecting a chosen toy in a toy box, books on a shelf.

Strategies to try

- Minimise the number of items in toy boxes, shelves and cupboards.
- Minimise number of items on desk, in pencil case, in school bag.
- Use transparent containers, pencil case, school bag, storage boxes.
- Encourage child to return items to a set position.
- Organise storage system with clearly labelled drawers and boxes using pictures, photos, colours.
- Try plain backgrounds, bed spread, walls, carpets
- Have colour coded symbols on the walls or wall colours to indicate the area of the room i.e. toys- yellow , clothes – green

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May also have difficulty recognising/ finding a person, object if viewed from an unusual angle or if the item is partially hidden. i.e. side or profile view of friend, shoe under the bed with only a toe showing.

Strategies to try

- Ensure items are clearly visible and not overlapping
- Store items in the upright position
- Try an elevated shoe rack
- Have an organised work space and mark out lines on the desk with coloured tape for book, pencil etc, keep items required on desk to a minimum
- Try using a schoolbag with individual pockets
- Try using a flat pencil case with a clearly allocated space for each item
- Try a transparent pencil case

May have difficulty recognising left and right shoe

Strategies to try

- Mark the inside heel of dominant shoe with a sticker or initial
- Mark dominant shoe with a phone charm

26. Sits closer to the television than about 30 cm. (NB this will not harm the child's vision)

Strategies to try

- Try a large screen TV
- Try a flat screen TV
- Try smaller TV if a large screen offers too much of a demand for scanning.
- Avoid visual clutter between seats and TV
- Avoid visual clutter i.e. photos, plants beside or above the TV
- Join film club / book club to obtain access to older slower moving films which have fewer visual effects.

27. Find copying words or drawings time consuming and difficult

Strategies to try

- Ensure written material is clearly visible depending on acuity and contrast.
- Practice visual memory games – eye spy, tell me what you saw
- Make use of auditory memory skills – speak out loud giving the information by sound as well as visually.
- Do not expect the child to write and speak or write and listen at the same time.

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Impairment of visually guided movement of the body and further evidence of visual field impairment

Difficulties may be impacted by visual field and may need retraining to adjust head position. Difficulties may also be related to perception of depth and judgement.

28. Holds on to your clothes tugging down when walking.

Strategies to try

- Try offering a straight arm for child to hold onto, which should be held slightly backwards, to give advance notice of height changes. This provides tactile information to child about the ground they are walking on.

29. Finds uneven ground difficult to walk on

Strategies to try

- Hold onto adults arm pulling down, adult should have a straight arm extended downwards.
- Give additional verbal reminders and instructions, e.g. “you need to lift your feet higher here as the ground is bumpy”
- Give additional reminders to change head position and look down.
- Use a physical aid to assist with balance and provide tactile input about the surface e.g. pram, wheeled toy, hockey stick, walking pole (this item needs to be age-appropriate and self selected).
- Ensure safe ground cover in outside areas that are frequently visited e.g. park, garden.
- Minimise height variations on floor surfaces.
- Make own walking stick to act as a guide from sticks collected in the park.
- Try white trainers to increase visibility of the feet.
- Practice balance skills, i.e. horse riding, wobble boards, obstacle courses.

30. Bumps into low furniture such as a coffee table

Strategies to try

- Get child to move furniture when it requires to be rearranged.
- Minimise the amount of furniture in each room thus maximising the space available for movement.
- Enhance colour contrast of furniture and floor
- Ensure that furniture purchased does not have glass or sharp edges
- Arrange room with space to move around if possible

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- Make room trails or footprints on the floor to mark the way.
- Consider the shape of the furniture and try to maximise floor space and movement areas.
- Avoid moving furniture if possible and involve the individual if required.
- Use plain carpet and wall coverings to reduce the amount of visual information being presented.

33. Explores floor boundaries (line to carpet) with their foot before crossing the boundary.

Strategies to try

- Clearly mark floor boundaries, surface and height changes.
- Try pushing a wheeled toy, walking stick etc to assist with tactile feedback. This needs to be age-appropriate and self selected.
- Ensure good lighting in areas with floor boundaries
- Try using plain colours of floor covering, avoiding patterns where possible.

34. Finds inside floor boundaries difficult to cross

Strategies to try

- Give additional physical support i.e. arm, rail, wall.

34a. Finds new surfaces difficult to cross

Strategies to try

- Give additional physical support.
- Arrive early to practice and help to reinforce awareness of surface changes.
- Try pushing a wheeled object across floor boundaries

34b. Finds well known boundaries difficult to cross

Strategies to try

- Give additional verbal reminders, “the floor changes to carpet in 3 steps.”
- Give additional physical support.
- Colour contrast floor boundaries and surface changes.
- Try pushing a wheeled object across floor boundaries.

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Impairment of visually guided movement of the upper limb resulting in poor judgement of grasp, hand position, finger width, positioning and timing

This results in difficulty with manual dexterity tasks and an increased likelihood of items being knocked or spilt.

35. Reaches incorrectly for object- reaching beyond or round it

Strategies to try

- Try using items that are contrasting in colour with the table unit.
- Practice with games and toys requiring targeting and controlled dexterity, e.g. Jenga, tea set, snap
- Use the other hand as a tactile guide for the location of the object, by holding the object with the non-dominant hand. This can instantly result in the reaching hand grasping the object between the fingers with a precise grip, rather than with an open handed grip, as the brain registers the position of the object through touch not vision. This tactile information can also be provided by touching the surface from which an object is being picked up from again giving the brain input through touch rather than vision.

36. When picking up an object will grasp incorrectly or miss or knock over the object.

Strategies to try

- Try using items which have a high colour contrast
- Try using weighted items
- Try blu-tak on bottom of cup
- Practice with games and toys requiring targeting and controlled dexterity e.g. Jenga, construction toys, Hama beads.

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Difficulties demonstrating impaired visual attention and fatigue which is likely to result in difficulties with tasks requiring sustained visual attention and concentration, especially school work

37. Finds it difficult to keep to task for more than 5 minutes.

Strategies to try

- Minimise visual distractions around the work area.
- Consider the need to minimise other distractions around the work area i.e. sound, movement.
- Encourage short periods of focused attention.
- Time concentration span and work with minimum concentration time to build it up.
- Try using a sound or visual timer to set limits.
- Vary tasks and demands i.e. seated , standing, moving, listening, talking, looking
- Give additional verbal reminders and encouragement. “you are doing well just one more minute”
- Try a fidget object to help with attention when using listening skills

38. Finds it difficult to get back on task when distracted

Strategies to try

- Minimise distractions around the work area.
- Present work tasks in short blocks breaking down activities.
- Present tasks one at a time.

39. Bumps into things when walking and having a conversation

Strategies to try

- Give additional verbal reminders, “there is a tree coming up in front of you”
- Encourage one task at a time i.e. walking or talking or listening
- Make only one demand at a time i.e. walk, talk, or listen.

40. Misses objects which are obvious because they are different from their back ground and seem to pop out e.g. a bright ball in the grass.

Strategies to try

- Reduce the amount of items presented.
- Space out items.
- Use contrasting colours of background and object i.e. plain floor, walls, bed spread.
- Maximise contrast and visibility to increase pop out effect.

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Difficulties demonstrating evidence of behavioural difficulties associated with crowded environments i.e. cinema, shopping centre.

This may be due to too much visual and or auditory stimulation which can be overwhelming and stressful.

41. Demonstrates difficult behaviour in cluttered rooms

Strategies to try

- Minimise clutter, especially visual clutter i.e. photos on the wall.
- Provide a quiet area with less clutter and visual stimulation in house.
- Be pre-warned to expect behaviour and take appropriate measures
- Try using plain flooring and wall coverings
- Try using plain fabric coverings on beds, seats etc.
- Clearly labelled, organised storage to reduce the amount of visual clutter around.
- Try smaller areas with less noise and visual information i.e., go to smaller shops.

42. Demonstrates difficult behaviour in quiet places

Strategies to try

- Avoid these situations where possible.
- Try a tactile object to provide alternative sensory input i.e. fidget object, toy, rubber, giant paper clip
- Try oral sensory input i.e. chewing gum, mint, lemon, ice lolly
- Try scents on a hanky to provide additional sensory input.
- Provide alternative stimulation i.e. use of IPod or MP3 player to reduce the silence.

43. Behaviour is difficult in a over stimulating or busy environment i.e. supermarket, shopping centre, assembly, dinner hall, playground

Strategies to try

- Try a tactile object to provide alternative sensory input i.e. fidget object, toy, rubber, giant paper clip
- Try oral sensory input i.e. chewing gum, mint, lemon, ice lolly
- Try scents on a hanky to provide additional sensory input.
- Try building up exposure and experience i.e. trips to small shops for one item. Get child to plan their own route for 1 or 2 items in the small shop first.

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- Prove additional sensory input through deep muscle activities i.e. pushing trolley, carrying the basket.
- Encourage help and assistance, i.e. while shopping to fetch items.
- Arrive early to give additional preparation time

44. Reacts angrily when other children are restless and distracting.

Strategies to try

- Try a screened off work area.
- Try head phones or ear plugs to reduce the noise level and auditory distractions.

Difficulty with the ability to recognise what is seen

For example people, shapes, family members, toys, left and right shoe: especially if the items are in a busy environment or are viewed from a different angle or are partly hidden.

45. Has difficulty recognising close relatives in real life i.e. Dad at a party, Mum at the school gate, friend in the play ground.

Strategies to try

- Try wearing easily identifiable clothing i.e. pink top, scarf. The item needs to be consistently visible from all angles. The child needs to be trained to look for it.
- Practice developing skills in voice recognition
- Give additional verbal information and clues i.e. call child's name
- Ensure people are aware of this difficulty and use their voice to introduce themselves, adults, teachers, other children.

48. Has difficulty understanding the meaning of facial expressions

Strategies to try

- Ensure people interacting with the child are aware of this and give additional verbal cues.
- Establish if the child can recognise facial expression at all, and if so what is the optimal distance.
- Encourage child to focus on tone of voice and words being used.
- Give a verbal explanation to accompany the facial expression using tone of voice and words. Encourage everyone interacting with child to also do this.

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- Use of voice and language with exaggerated quality of expressed emotions to assist child with understanding.

49. Has difficulty naming common colours

Strategies to try

- Establish if this is due to colour blindness.
- Discover if it is due to word recognition.
- Practice with the primary colours using familiar objects in 3 D.
- Try applying the concept of conceptual linkage i.e. rose red, green grass, sky blue.

50. Has difficulty naming basic shapes such as squares, triangles, letters, circles, left shoe /right shoe.

Strategies to try

- Practice using 3 D shapes
- Use a tactile approach touching and exploring objects with hands
- Practice making shapes with finger in sand, shaving foam
- Minimise the amount of visual information presented at one time
- Play computer games to reinforce recognition skills.
- Highlight dominant shoe with sticker/ phone charm / initials.

General left right recognition

- Hold hand out in front palm down extend thumb- the left hand makes an L shape between the thumb and pointing finger.
- Try a ring on the Right hand.
- Play left-right games, e.g. Simon says, bean bag catching while shouting out which hand to use, Twister.

51. Has difficulty recognising familiar objects such as the family car in car park, front door on the street

Strategies to try

- Get a unique identifiable visible marker to help recognition, i.e. plant on doorstep to recognise door, hanging toy in car, toy/cushion on back window ledge of car.

52. Difficulty recognising objects on a similar back ground i.e. white tee-shirt on a white sheet.

Strategies

- Use contrasting, plain colours and backgrounds

Curated by Ulster University Vision Resources:

Available to download at: <http://biomed.science.ulster.ac.uk/vision/Visual-Skills-Inventories.html>

Developed by Debbie Cockburn & Prof Dutton at Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Glasgow Caledonian University & funded by the Scottish Spina Bifida Association Research Project.

Ulster University Vision Resources

Home Strategies for difficulties associated with CVI, highlighted by clinical structured history taking inventory.
Younger child (4-8 years)

53. Difficulty visually accessing the computer

Strategies

- Highlight key board with luminous alphabet stickers
- Try using a matt screen not gloss
- Increase font size thus reducing the amount of information present.
- Use specific fonts that are easier to read e.g. Tahoma, Trebuchet
- Try a larger keyboard with enlarged keys
- Try an adapted mouse or keyboard.
- Practice mouse and keyboard skills through games and fun activities.

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