

The Visual Sense

Visual sense is our ability to see. From an early age we use our vision to make sense of the environment around us. Our vision is important in learning new skills and engaging with others.



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Visual Hypersensitivity

A child who is hypersensitive to visual stimuli can have difficulties with appropriately filtering visual input and therefore become easily overwhelmed.

Behaviours that maybe seen include:

- May appear distracted, and or non-functional in an environment with visual stimulation (e.g. artificial lighting), or when doing visual tasks (especially tasks such as reading).
- May react strongly to colourful or complex images i.e. they find them confusing.
- They find messy desks, rooms etc. stressful (due to visual clutter).
- Sensitive to direct eye contact.
- Difficulties copying from blackboard or books.
- Avoidance of visually stimulating environments.
- Preference for dim lighting.
- Tires easily or gets irritable when attending to visually complex tasks.
- Squinting, rubbing eyes or getting headaches after reading but not requiring glasses.
- May have difficulties with fluorescent lighting.



Strategies to help the visually over stimulated child:

For those who are overstimulated by clutter

- Minimize visual stimulation for the child who is overwhelmed.
- Minimize visual clutter on the blackboard.
- Teach the student to only put on their desk, what they need for the task at hand

For those with visual overstimulation to light intensity or frequency:

- Imagine sitting in class, and trying to pay attention. But your eyes hurt because it feels like there's a bright floodlight being shone in your eyes. Now as you feel a headache building, the teacher is telling you 'Pay attention!'
- Use natural lighting whenever possible (but place student away from window because they may be sensitive to direct sunlight).
- For a time-out, soothing place, consider using dimmed lighting, or candle light
- Consider getting the child sunglasses or even opaque eyeshades to wear (available in most pharmacies).
- Try to avoid artificial, fluorescent lighting whenever possible – in addition, many fluorescent lights have distracting humming that can affect students.

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Visual Under-sensitivity:

A child may be under responsive to visual input/stimuli. Behaviours that maybe seen include:

- Misses visual clues.
- Touches everything (in order to make up for lack of visual input)
- Can't read body language.
- Trouble with finding objects in cluttered spaces.
- Trouble with puzzles.
- Difficulties reading, because s/he loses his/her places.
- Student may not attend to visual cues or information because they cannot register it.
- Difficulties copying from the blackboard or books.
- Preference for brightly lit rooms.
- Preference for visually stimulating lessons – facial expressions, hand gestures, colourful etc.

Strategies to help the visually under stimulated/under responsive child:

- Increase visual stimulation when teaching this child
- Use hand gestures, bright lights, lots of colour and movement. Highlight text. Use different coloured papers, or headings.
- Use natural lighting or bright lighting
- Add different visual components to tasks. For example: clapping or jumping when teaching math, bright colours for teaching tools, use of movies/videos etc.'

