

# Role of the Vision Specialist

*When a family or BTT team member has concerns that a visual impairment may be present, a vision specialist can be selected to conduct a vision evaluation. This would **not** replace the need for a vision diagnosis but will assist the optometrist or ophthalmologist by providing information on visual behaviors that will support an appropriate diagnosis. (Note: Only ophthalmologists or neurologist can diagnosis CVI.)*

*Because vision impairment can affect all areas of development, a vision specialist may provide IFSP services while the family is in the process of obtaining a diagnosis. This will help the family in learning ways to enhance the child's ability to learn and interact with the environment with the desired outcome that secondary delays will be prevented or minimized.*

## Types of Visual Impairments (Blindness and Low Vision):

- Ocular Impairment: impairments pertaining to the eye itself.
- Cortical Vision Impairment (CVI): vision impairments caused by an injury to the brain such as PVL, IVH, stroke, shaken baby, etc.
- Astigmatism.
- Nystagmus.
- Combination of above.

## Role of Vision Specialist

1. Conduct vision evaluation for infants and toddlers suspected of having a visual impairment.
2. Interpret vision reports for family and team members.
3. Conduct a functional vision assessment. (How does the child utilize his/her vision in their environment?)
4. Evaluate the child's overall developmental status by adapting assessment tools as appropriate and assist to interpret results.
5. Collaborate/consult with other professionals/evaluators on the selection of appropriate assessment and interpreting the results for children with visual impairments.
6. Guide the family in their understanding of the terminology pertaining to their child's vision impairment.
7. Participate in the development of the child's IFSP.
8. Guide the family in their understanding of the impact to their child's vision impairment.
9. Collaborate/consult with all member of the child's team regarding the potential impact of the vision loss on the child's development, impact specific to provider's discipline, and appropriate accommodations and modifications specific to the discipline and IFSP goals.
10. Provide resources that pertain to the child's vision impairment, parent organizations and contact with other families.
11. Guide the families in creating an accessible and functional environment for their child.
12. Collaborate/consult with the team to determine appropriate technology to use with the child.
13. Assist in the transition to school including eligibility and services.

The following vision service components should be considered in developing a child's IFSP

1. Development of attachment and meaningful social relationships and communication skills (listening, turn-taking, personal expression, nonverbal communication, emergent literacy).
2. Assessment of sensory capabilities and preferences in order to facilitate the effective use of all senses, including the use of low vision devices if appropriate.
3. Adaptation of environments, toys, and learning materials to make them more accessible.
4. Use of compensatory skills to accommodate for vision loss (e.g., strategies for accomplishing tasks using touch rather than vision; learning to use all senses as effectively as possible).
5. Cognitive development opportunities that are experienced-based and designed to teach concepts that are acquired primarily through vision (basic concepts, problem-solving skills).
6. Facilitation of emergent literacy including pre-literacy for potential Braille and print readers through collaboration with families and other professionals.
7. Gross and fine motor development (as well as the development of physical control and stamina) with special attention to prerequisite skills required for age appropriate orientation and mobility, and Braille, print reading and writing if appropriate.
8. Development of age-appropriate orientation and mobility instruction (self-directed, independent movement in the environment).
9. Instruction in daily living skills typically acquired through incidental visual learning that must be taught using hands-on, step-by-step procedures to infants and toddlers with visual impairments for them to function independently within natural environments (e.g., self-care skills, ability to do household chores).
10. Comprehensive family support that includes emotional support and access to information and resources that will help families become life-long advocates for their children.
11. Thorough understanding of medical and visual conditions and their implications for early intervention and education services.
12. Recreational opportunities that enhance creativity and enjoyment.