

Learning Media Assessment

The *learning media assessment* is conducted by a teacher of students with visual impairments. It is used to find out which senses your child uses most to get information from the environment. Once this is known, decisions can be made about which method or methods your child should use for learning, reading, and other literacy tasks. For example, if your child uses her sense of touch primarily and most often to explore the environment, it may be recommended that she learn braille for reading and writing.

In this assessment, after reviewing your child's records, the teacher of students with visual impairments observes your child in a variety of activities. For each of your child's behaviors that the teacher observes, he or she will note which sense (touch, vision, or hearing) your child uses primarily, and what additional sense she uses, if any. For example, if your child is exploring a brightly colored toy, she might spend most of her time feeling around the surface, but occasionally hold the toy up close to her left eye. The teacher in this case would note that the primary sense used in this activity was touch, and the secondary sense was vision.

Your child's educational team uses this information to determine your child's best learning medium—the method or methods she uses to perform essential tasks such as reading and writing. If your child is already reading and writing, the teacher of students with visual impairments will also examine your child's literacy activities—the way in which she reads and writes—as part of the learning media assessment, as well as the materials, or literacy media, that she uses. The teacher may also assess your child's reading speed, the degree of fatigue she may experience when reading, and how well she understands what she is reading. Based on this information, the teacher can make recommendations, such as whether your child would benefit from learning braille or from learning how to use a particular low vision device such as a

magnifier.

It is important to know that IDEA provides for instruction in braille for children who have a visual impairment unless a relevant evaluation demonstrates that instruction in braille is *not* appropriate. Braille instruction is therefore considered a "given," and braille is automatically taught unless there is reason *not* to teach it. This means that braille should be taught to your child unless there is evidence that she will not benefit from learning it. You may wonder why your child should learn braille when she seems like a visual learner. Of course, if she is already reading print, the question of braille may not come up at all. As your child grows older, however, print becomes smaller and may become more difficult for her to read, even with low vision devices. Or your child's eye condition may deteriorate. Both of these situations are reasons why you may want to expose her to braille instruction early in her education. Teaching braille provides children with visual impairments with a choice of an additional tool for reading and writing so that they are in a better position to determine which ones work best for them. Not everyone who uses braille is totally blind. Many people with visual impairment use braille only for certain tasks, in certain circumstances, as one tool in addition to a number of others. In kindergarten and early elementary school, it might not be obvious yet which instructional medium your child will be most successful with, so expect a period of experimentation as you and your child's educational team try to figure out what works best.

There are formal assessments used to examine learning media and teachers of students with visual impairments may have developed their own informal assessments, too. As with other specialized assessments, it's important for parents to be involved in assessment because they know their children best and have observed their sensory preferences far more often than teachers typically have. It will be helpful for you to work with your child's teacher of students with visual impairments to make sure you are on the same page about which literacy medium is best for your child.

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