How I discover!

How parents can help their blind baby

BARTIMÉUS SERIES

Bartiméus wants to record and share knowledge and experience about the capabilities of people with visual impairments. The Bartiméus series is one of the ways they do this.

Colophon

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Foreword

While our daughter Anne was growing up, we became very aware of how much influence a severe visual impairment has on the development of a child. We could never have imagined that beforehand. Developments such as lifting up her head, grasping objects, smiling, sitting and standing did not appear to be as self-evident for Anne as for her three older brothers. As parents, you often don't know what to do about that.
Gaining self-confidence was also not easy for Anne, because things could easily seem unfamiliar and therefore felt threatening to her. Initially, we noticed that we were frequently unable to understand her, and that she probably could not understand us either. The guidance we received helped us to slowly enter a world unfamiliar to us; the world in which Anne lived. We realised that we had to view the world differently , and understand that many things that were so obvious to us, were not so for her. The many practical examples and the advice and assistance we received, as well as the discussions we had about how Anne might experience things, helped us get to know her world.

This booklet contains a lot of practical advice, descriptions of the ways children with visual impairments might experience things, and how to help them. The necessarily large quantity of advice reflects the extent to which the disability influences so many aspects of a child's development. It often concerns things you can't imagine yourself, because you have to learn to take a whole new and unfamiliar perspective.
This book may give the impression that there's a lot that 'must' be done. It can be discouraging to realise just how many aspects of development and daily life are influenced by visual impairment. We've gone through this ourselves from time to time. Sometimes you just don't have the time, energy and patience to deal with it. If that happens, remember that not everything is necessary. See this book as a reference source: if something goes wrong, you can use it to find out what you can do. Fortunately, many things go well 'automatically'; this differs from child to child. After many practical examples and insights into the experiential world of your child, you'll eventually find yourself at home in that world too. Allowing you to also find solutions for situations that aren't covered in the book. After a while, it'll become second nature. Once you're at home in that world, you'll no longer need the 'map' as much, if at all. Anne is now almost five years old. Her first years were intense and sometimes required a great deal of patience on our part. We've felt frustrated when we couldn't understand Anne's extreme fear of something, or when we saw her inability to understand how things worked, or when she couldn't imitate something because she couldn't see it. Slowly, however, we noticed that our growing insight into her world enabled us to help and guide her better. Anne has grown into a positive, curious little girl with a large degree of confidence, and

she loves to try new things. Things go very well as long as we keep in mind how we can help her with that. For us, the journey has been difficult at times, but it has also been a fascinating and invaluable experience. We wish the other parents, family and carers/guardians of children with severe visual impairments well on their journey, with this travel guide in hand!

Annelies and Merijn Bosman

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Introduction

As a parent, being told that your baby can't see brings up a whole lot of questions. How can you best deal with your child? What do you have to be aware of? Do you have to adapt the way you do everything, or simply do everything as normally as possible?

Babies discover and learn to trust their environment through play. They become aware of the world around them through their senses. This is no different for blind babies. However, there is a difference in the way they experience the world around them and the manner in which they learn. We have written this book to help parents to understand and support their blind baby. The book contains mainly practical information about what parents will encounter in daily life at home. It is intended as a reference work that gives some ideas on how to do things. How can you engage with your child in an enjoyable way and how can you help him to move, play, and discover and understand the world around him?

All of the chapters can be read individually. The first chapter contains general information about blindness, and the following chapters cover daily interaction with your blind baby.

We have chosen to refer to the baby as 'he' throughout the book. However, wherever 'he' is used, you can also read 'she'. Furthermore, although we mostly speak about blind babies in this book, we also take this to include babies who are severely visually impaired.

Minette Roza and Katinka Bakker

1 The blind baby

One-year-old Bart is sitting on the floor next to the cold central heating. He's been keeping himself endlessly entertained with the lovely sounds he's making on it using a block and his hands.

Babies develop at an incredible pace in the first two years of their lives, growing from tiny dependent beings into mischievous, active toddlers. This doesn't have to be any different for a blind baby. However, not being able to see does have a great effect on how the child gets to know his or her world. Parents will have many questions: how should we engage with our baby, what will the future look like for him, what needs to happen?

1.1 When is a baby blind?

In the first weeks after birth, there is often little discernible difference between a baby with normal vision and a blind baby. This is mainly because all newborn children have poor vision. After a couple of weeks the difference becomes clearer, and this is often the moment that parents begin to feel concerned. It can often still take some time before it really becomes clear that the baby can see very little or nothing.
A baby is considered to be blind if there is:

- Complete blindness, meaning that there is no eyesight and no perception of light/dark.
- Social blindness, meaning that there is severe visual impairment. Vision is limited to the perception of light and dark, and possibly some colour and shape. Severely visually impaired children, just like completely blind children, will depend on Braille in their later lives.

The greatest difference between both forms of blindness in babies can be seen by switching on a lamp. A completely blind baby will not respond to the lamp at all, while a baby with some degree of vision will turn towards the source of the light. Children who perceive light and dark can move through a space more easily because they still have some visible landmarks, such as the light coming through a window.

1.2 Absence of a visible example

Young children learn a great deal by watching and imitating others. A baby will already try to imitate you after just a few weeks. Blind children can't do this. They will have to find some other way of learning many self-evident actions. There are many activities that blind children will never learn on their own because they cannot see how others do them, such as drinking from a cup or eating with a spoon.

1.3 Use of the other senses

Small children learn by using their senses, including sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste. If any of the senses is partially or completely missing, the other senses don't suddenly get better. If you help a blind child to compensate for a lack of sight by using touch, hearing and smell, you will encourage him to make conscious use of these senses. In many cases, blind children will also do this all by themselves.

1.4 Blindisms

Blind children may display a number of striking behaviours that can be grouped under the term 'blindism'.
Some examples include:

- Rocking the body back and forth, both when sitting down and standing.
- Rotating the head, sometimes in combination with the upper body.
- Flapping the hands at shoulder height.
- Jumping up and down, mostly in combination with hand flapping.
- Eye pressing, that is, pressing on one or both eyes with one or more fingers or a fist.

In addition, socially blind children who still have some degree of vision will sometimes try to catch or play with light. In doing so, they may make strange eye

movements and flutter their fingers in front of their eyes. A characteristic trait of blindism is that the child makes movements that he is not conscious of . These movements are repetitive and appear to serve no purpose. These behaviours in blind children seem to increase in the first few years, but become less frequent again between the ages of three to six. They occur mainly when the children are bored or if they want to avoid certain situations, but can also be sign of excitement and enthusiasm.
Most blindisms are harmless except for eye pressing, which can damage the eye.

2 Interaction and approach

Tom's father has put on a new aftershave. He tries to kiss Tom, but Tom pushes him away. It's as if he doesn't recognise his father.

As a parent, you spend many hours a day with your baby. This gives you the opportunity to get to know and understand him, and to respond to him in the right way as a parent. Because they lack important visual information, blind babies often experience greater difficulty in understanding the world around them than sighted children. For example, a blind baby may react with shock if something happens that he didn't hear coming. By being aware of your child's visual impairment in your daily interactions, you can help him to feel safe and to get a better grip on his environment. In this chapter, we briefly describe a number of general tips for approaching and interacting with your baby. These points will be further developed in later chapters.

2.1 Approach

Blind babies like being able to hear, feel and smell you. It creates a degree of predictability for him, which he can focus on and which gives him a sense of confidence. You can help create this for him. As a parent, you are the secure foundation for your baby from which he can discover the world. Keep a close eye on him to see if he needs you close by, or can go exploring himself. Be aware that your child will show that he has noticed something or that something is unpleasant for him with many more signals than just smiling and crying. Examples include turning towards the source of a sound, becoming very still (falling silent), holding his breath, making sounds, opening his hands when relaxed and closing them when tense. Talk to him regularly so that he knows you're close by. Be aware that radio and television sounds make it more difficult for him to hear you and to orient himself towards the voices of familiar people and ambient sounds. Tell your child what's going to happen in order to prepare him and prevent him from being startled by unexpected occurrences. For example: "Ruben, I'm going to lift you out of your playpen." Let him feel and smell you when you do this, and address him by his name. Try not to grasp your baby directly by his hands or head, as this can be frightening for him. You can make yourself recognisable as his permanent carer by always wearing the same fragrance. Letting your baby touch a bracelet, ring or watch that you regularly wear will also help him to recognise you.

2.2 Interaction

You can help your baby to have all kinds of interesting experiences in your daily interactions with him. Some examples follow.

2.2.1 Encourage him to use all of his senses

Your blind baby's inability to see can be compensated for to a large extent by letting him use his other senses. Encouraging him to use hearing, touch and smell will teach him how to obtain a lot of information. Have him smell the baby lotion, touch his nappy and listen to the bath water running. Tap his hand to let him know that you're about to give him something. You can put down a toy, a bottle or a spoon with an audible tap so that your child hears where it is.

2.2.2 Use verbal support

Tell your child what's happening or what's about to happen. Preferably use short sentences, always formulated in the same way. No matter how young your baby is, some part of your message will always come across. Children often understand far more than their parents realise, even though they have not yet mastered the language. Use concepts such as "under and over", "in and out", "up and down" and "to and from". Don't use words like "here and there", as this is far too abstract for a blind child and tells him nothing. Instead, say: "Your stuffed toy is lying in the corner of the sofa."

2.2.3 Allow him to feel the whole action

By feeling the whole action, your baby will gain insight into the full process of the skill to be learned. You can help him to experience an action by sitting behind him and putting your hands over his hands, and then directing his actions. For example, you can put differently shaped blocks into a shape sorting box together, bring a spoon to his mouth together, and roll a ball together. The key is to carry out the whole movement together. Remember to tell your child that you're going to put your hands over his. Once your child can control his movements better, you can direct his actions by his wrists and then later by his elbows.

2.2.4 Time and repetition

A child needs time and repetition in order to master a skill; time to thoroughly investigate objects with his hands, feet and mouth, and repetition to ultimately master the actions independently. Encouragement and compliments help him to keep trying and practising.

3 Contact and communication

Iris is lying in her playpen. Each time her mother goes and talks to her, Iris turns her face away from her. Her mother thinks Iris doesn't want contact with her and feels sad.

All newborn babies see very little. However, eyesight develops rapidly in most children. They are able to make eye contact with their parents within a couple of weeks. If your baby is blind, eye contact will be impossible and touch and language will be the most important ways in which you make contact with each other. Therefore, in order to form a good bond it's very important to get to know and recognise your blind baby's behaviour.
The older children get, the more they do for themselves. This includes making contact with their parents and their environment. This is harder for blind children, because they can't see where their parents are. They find it more difficult to seek contact, because they don't always know whether a parent is nearby. This means that, as a parent, you will need to be more active and clear in order to let your child know where you are. The clearer you are, the easier it will be for your child to take the initiative in making contact. Your blind child will depend on you for longer than a sighted child would.
This chapter describes everything you need to know about building up good contact with your baby.

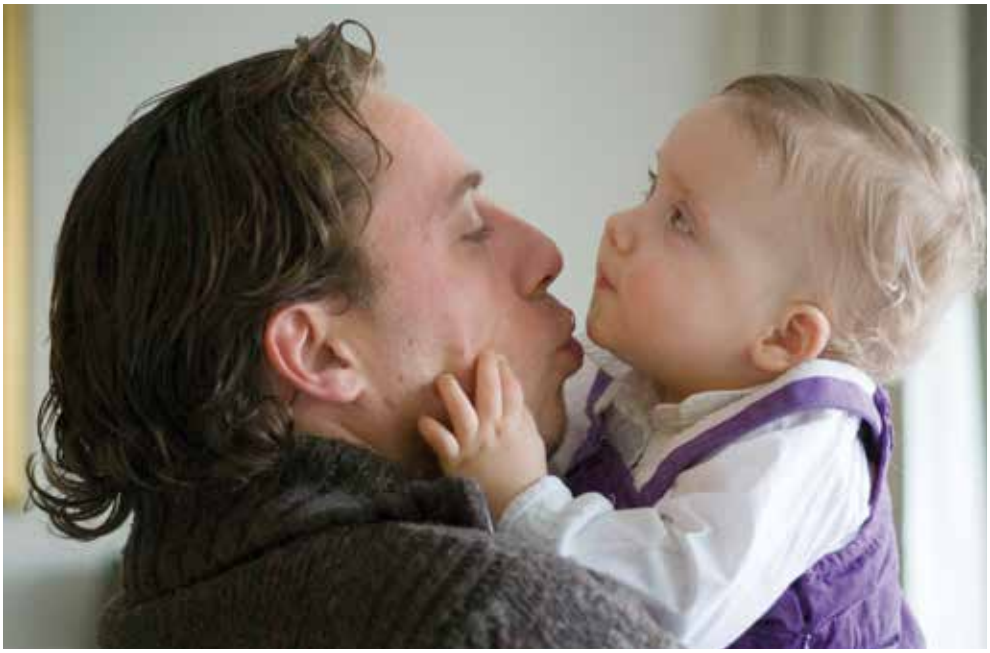
3.1 Body language

Before your baby can talk, you will already have a great deal of contact and communicate extensively with each other, often without being aware of it. Your baby's first language is body language. You can find out a lot by paying close attention to your baby's body language. He will often show how he feels with his hands. If his hands are open, it can mean that he wants contact or that he is enjoying what you're doing. If his hands are closed or balled up into fists, that can mean that he feels uncomfortable or finds something stressful. If he keeps still and holds his breath, this can indicate concentration. If he turns his head away while turning an ear towards you, it doesn't mean that he doesn't want anything to do with you. It actually means that he's listening carefully to you and is interested. By paying attention to your child's breathing, you can find out how he is feeling. If he's relaxed, he'll be breathing calmly, and if he's excited or stressed, his breathing will be more rapid.

3.2 Attachment

By responding as appropriately as possible to your baby's signals, you will foster the formation of an emotional bond between you. In the first weeks of his life, crying will be the most important way for your baby to communicate, after which he will begin to make his first sounds. Responding adequately to crying is essential in order to give your baby a basic sense of security and to allow him to become attached to you. A secure attachment provides your child with the foundation to develop his self-confidence and 20 form emotional bonds with others. To promote

secure attachment, you should touch your baby a lot, carry him, hug him, take him onto your lap and talk to him. This will give him a feeling of security and will teach him to recognise you and distinguish you from others. Be aware that your baby can also identify you by your scent, so it's best for him if you don't change the perfume or aftershave you use. Your baby will start to smile upon hearing your voice or smelling your scent, and after a while will also react negatively to strangers. This 'shyness' is a normal phase in the development of all children and means that your child is becoming attached to you. Blind children generally enter the shy phase later, when they are around 1 year old. Sighted children encounter this phase around the eighth month.



3.3 Contact

A newborn baby is still very dependent on his parents and wants to be close to them. This closeness is important for building up good contact and forming a strong attachment with each other. In the first months, the parent will be the one to initiate contact. After about two months, however, your blind baby may also seek contact with you. He will do this by extending his hands and trying to touch you when you're close to him. At around five months of age, he will touch your face. A blind child can't make eye contact with you, so if you say something to him, he won't know that it was meant for him. You will therefore need to make contact in a different way. By doing this in the same way each time, your child will learn to recognise you faster. For example, you could say his name and touch him in the same place each time. This should preferably not be on the palms of his

hands or on his face, as this might startle him, because they are very sensitive parts of his body.

3.3.1 Your baby's first smile

For sighted children, the first smile is an important milestone in their development and in their contact with their surroundings. For full-term children, this occurs after an average of around six weeks. The baby will often smile upon seeing his mother or father. This smile motivates the parents to make contact with and respond to their baby, and this promotes bonding between parents and child. A blind baby will only smile if he hears a familiar voice or feels a familiar touch. Let your child know that you're happy with his smile by responding positively. For example, you could say something loving to him, or tickle him briefly. When your baby is older, you can also let him feel your smile with his hands. It will take a little longer for him to recognise this and attach meaning to it.

3.3.2 Contact with others

A blind baby feels at one with his carers for a long time, longer than sighted children do. It's difficult for him to distinguish between himself and another

person. From around the fifth month, he will show that he prefers being picked up and carried by his mother or father by behaving in a relaxed way. If a stranger picks him up, he may react tensely and perhaps even cry. You can help your baby to become accustomed to other adults by allowing other trusted people to pick him up and carry him in familiar surroundings every now and again. He will then learn that other people can also be safe and trusted. He will discover that other voices use the same words and make the same sounds. Your child is more likely to accept getting to know other adults if you take it carefully. You can ask the other person to talk to him first, so that he can get used to the new voice. Give your child the opportunity to touch the other person, preferably while you are holding him in your arms or on your lap. You can do this by helping your child to touch the other person's hand or face. The other person can perhaps stroke your child's arm or leg in order to make contact.

3.3.3 Contact with other children

If your baby has a brother or sister, he will learn from an early age that there are other children with whom he can interact. They will approach their blind sibling in a different way to you, either very carefully, or perhaps without appearing to adjust their behaviour at all. It's important to encourage your children to have a lot of contact with each other. As your child gets older, mutual contact will become more important. If he has no siblings, you will need to bring him into contact with other children. After all, children behave differently with each other than adults do with a child. Your child can learn a lot from this, including sharing attention, waiting his turn and imitating others' use of language. It's also valuable for him to learn how to make contact with others. He will learn how to make sense of another child's sounds. Blind children need extra help in learning about the feelings of others. After all, they can't perceive facial expressions, so can't learn to read and recognise feelings in this way. Support your child by expressing emotions with an appropriate tone in your voice. Describe what other children do, how they look and how they express their feelings. 'Can you hear Kim crying? She is angry, because she can't have a biscuit.'

3.3.4 Contact outdoors

Babies generally enjoy going outside. This is also true for blind children, but being outside is not always pleasant for them. The sounds and smells outside are different from those inside. That's why it's important for you to also make and stay in contact with your child while outside. This can be more difficult to do than when you're inside. The wind can make it harder for you to understand each other, and you may be talking to each other over a greater distance than usual. It may be a good idea to use a pushchair in which your child faces towards you rather than facing away from you. This will make it easy for you to see how he responds and he will be better able to 24 25 hear you. You will also be able to talk more with your child. Be aware that a cap that covers your child's ears may hinder him in hearing your voice. You may find it harder to talk much to your child outside, and

other people may react strangely. Even so, it's still important to talk to him a lot while you're outside. This will let your baby know that you're nearby, and will also help him to better understand the sounds outside. If you keep announcing them in the same way, your baby will eventually be less shocked by unexpected sounds, such as a passing moped.

3.4 Language

For blind children, spoken language is an important means of getting to know and understand the people and the world around them. Babies begin to babble at around six months of age. At first they do it purely for their own pleasure, and later also in response to their parents. This babbling does not consist of words and has little meaning as yet. However, the sounds are often made consciously. As a parent, you can respond to these sounds by imitating them. Your baby may really enjoy this. An interesting game you can play with your baby to strengthen your contact with him, is to make sounds close to your baby and allow him to feel where the sounds are coming from. Sit with your legs tucked up so that your baby can lie or sit on them facing you. Sing or talk to your child and encourage him to feel your face and mouth with his hands while you do so. If he makes sounds himself, imitate him. The sounds that you make for him, such as singing a song, are important for his language development in this phase. A blind child can sometimes be noticeably quiet. This is because he's concentrating on listening. He is dependent on sounds to know whether or not you are close by, and to follow what's going on around him. He is more likely to start babbling early in an

environment that's familiar to him and has familiar sounds. The sounds coming from a radio or television can drown out these kinds of sounds. You should also be aware that it's more difficult for a blind child to listen well if he is surrounded by distracting sounds. This makes it harder for him to understand his environment.

3.4.1 First words

At some point, usually after their first birthday, babies say their first word. Often that word is mama, papa or the name of an important object from their surroundings. When he says his first words, try to find out what exactly your child wants to say and reward him for talking by showing that you understand him. 26 You can guide your child's daily actions with short sentences. Emphasise the most important word and let your child feel it. For example: 'Here is the SOAP, and now I'm using it to wash your FOOT.' By linking the word to something tangible in this way, you give the language meaning. When your child starts using words, it's best if he knows the right ones. As a parent, you should always use the exact name of an object, such as 'car' instead of 'brrrm brrrm'. Use 'I' when talking about yourself, instead of 'mama' or 'papa'.

3.4.2 Singing songs, reciting rhymes

Most young children enjoy having songs sung to them. It's a way of being playful with language. Children quickly learn to recognise a song's words due to the fixed order and the rhythm. Songs are even more appealing when they have a clear topic, such as 'Itsy Bitsy Spider' or 'Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes'.

3.4.3 Verbalism

A blind child learns many words and how to repeat them, but sometimes does not sufficiently understand their meaning. We call this verbalism. The word refrigerator is just a sound that can be heard from time to time. Most children do not realise that it is also an appliance, unless they are explicitly told so. As your child grows, encourage him to use his sense of touch as much as possible. This will help to give words real meaning. Your child will only properly understand the world around him 27 28 and learn how to use the right words if he has as many concrete experiences as possible. Various situations can give him the chance to learn the connections between objects, concepts and verbs. For this reason, you should give your child as many opportunities as possible to touch the objects that you're talking about. When you do so, explain what the object is used for as simply as possible. 'Here, Mees, this is your toothbrush. Can you feel it? We're going to use it to brush your teeth.'

3.4.4 Echolalia

Blind children can sometimes repeat words or phrases or parrot people's speech, often for longer than other children. This is called echolalia. In this case, rather than using language as a means of communication, they are using it in a playful way and to practise making sounds. As a parent, you don't need to worry about this in the first couple of years. However, over time your child's language should start to have more meaning than just the simple repetition of words.

4 Caring for your baby

Peter's grandmother is visiting. Together with his mother, she gives Peter a bath. While they're doing this, Peter's mother and grandmother talk about anything and everything. Peter bursts into tears, although he usually loves having a bath.

Small children need a lot of care, from washing and dressing to brushing teeth and changing nappies. As they grow older, they will do more and more things for themselves. This is partly because they see others doing these things and want to imitate them, and partly because they are encouraged to do so. However, if your baby can't see what's about to happen, it will feel as if most of it is just being done to him, and he may quickly feel tense and insecure. In general, blind children require care and direct attention for longer. After all, they cannot see how others do things, which makes it harder for them to imitate an action. Sometimes they have no idea of what's expected of them. This requires that they be involved with the care in a different way. This chapter describes how you can be aware of your baby's needs, and how you can care for him in a way that makes him more aware of what's going to happen, making him more comfortable.

General

As with all care activities, it's important to announce what you're going to do beforehand. You need to compensate for the fact that your child can't see what's going to happen. You can do this in a number of ways, for example by talking to your child and giving him time to get a feel for where he is. You can also allow him to touch the things you're going to use and smell the associated scents. Consistently carrying out actions in a set order will eventually make the process predictable for your child. Next we will discuss the various care activities in more detail.

4.1 Bathing

Most babies enjoy having a bath. However, parents do need to make some necessary preparations. What do you need to keep in mind?

4.1.1 Preparations

Lay out everything you need in advance, so that you won't be caught unprepared once your baby's already in the water. If your baby is awake and nearby during the preparations, talk about what you're doing. Explain that the sound he can hear is the running tap with water coming out of it, tell him that you've taken the clean clothes and the towel out of the cupboard and laid them out ready for him.
You should try to bathe your baby in the same place as often as possible. This will help him learn to recognise the space as the place where he has a bath. There are other noises in the bathroom and naturally they sound different to those in his bedroom. Make sure that the surroundings and the bathwater are at a pleasant temperature.

If your baby finds the baby bath unpleasant, then a tummy tub (large bucket) is a good alternative. Many blind babies seem to prefer the smaller tummy tub with its more enclosed feeling.

4.1.2 Putting your baby into the bath

Right before putting your baby in the bath, let him feel a few drops of water on his hand or foot.

Hold your baby firmly as you pick him up and put him in the bath. Your child will feel secure if you hold him under his bottom and support his neck. First, carefully lower his feet into the water so that he can get used to the feeling and temperature of the water. Don't go too fast, and pay close attention to your baby's reaction. Are his hands open and is he relaxed, or does he appear to be startled by the feel of the water? Talk calmly to him, explain what you're doing and what he can feel and smell.

Toys are unnecessary at first. It's more important to allow him to experience the way his body moves in the water.

When he's a little older, he will be able to feel where the sides of the bath are. You can help him to discover this. Take it slowly and calmly. If you ever don't have enough time to do so, then it's best to skip the bath that time. It's important for your blind child that actions take place in a fixed order. This will help him to recognise what's going to happen next. If you like, you can sing a bath time song. Make sure that you give your child your full attention, and don't allow yourself to become distracted.
Once your child is bigger, he can play with containers and stacking cups in the bath. Pouring water and feeling the weight of a full cup versus an empty cup are fun games to play. Encourage your baby to slap the water and clap his wet hands. A sponge and a washcloth are fun objects to explore and play with. Your child can learn to help in his own way. Encourage him to wash his own stomach, helping by holding the washcloth. Allowing him to do things himself or help you do them gives him a sense of control over what's happening. It's advisable to make use of the baby bath as long as possible, even when your child can sit independently. The small enclosed area of the baby bath will give your child a feeling of security. He will also be able to easily find his toys. One option is to put the baby bath inside the large bath or in the shower cubicle.

4.1.3 Washing and hair washing

Most small children enjoy a good bath. Even if young children don't yet understand what's being said to them, it gives them a safe feeling if they are talked to during a bath. For example, you could say: 'I've put soap on the washcloth and now I'm going to wash your stomach.' You can then let your child smell the scent of the soap on the washcloth and feel the difference between a dry and a wet washcloth. When he's a little bigger, he can explore the soap himself. If it's liquid soap from a bottle, put the bottle in his hands. Let him feel how you put the soap on your hand or on the washcloth. A piece of solid soap is easier to handle if it's still dry. Pay attention to the scent of the soap; close your eyes and consciously smell it yourself. Does it smell pleasant, or is the scent too strong and overpowering? If so, consider changing to another brand. Many small children dislike having their hair washed. When your child is big enough, involve him in what's going to happen as much as possible. For example, it's fine for him to touch his hair while there's shampoo in it. Encourage him to lay his hand on yours in order to join in with the movement.
When rinsing the shampoo out, it may be necessary to hold your baby in a different position. Some children may become a bit scared when this happens. Describe calmly what you're going to do, while holding your child firmly. It is advisable to use a cup of warm water or a wet washcloth to rinse his hair. Your child may be startled if you use a shower for this. You can also try putting a washcloth over the shower head. This makes the stream thicker so that it feels less unpleasant.
If you notice that your child reacts with panic in spite of this, remain calm and only complete the actions that are really necessary.

4.1.4 After the bath

Once you've finished bathing him, tell your child that you're going to lift him out of the bath. Make sure that you have a towel to hand so that you can quickly wrap him in it. When drying him off, try to stick to a fixed order. This will eventually make your actions predictable to him. Name as many body parts as possible while you're drying them. On the one hand, this will help you get used to it yourself, and on the other your baby will get used to the words so that they become self-evident concepts for him later.

Regularly take the time to massage your child or apply body lotion to him. This kind of touch is very pleasant for your child, helping him to experience all of his body parts and become more aware of his own body. It's also good for the attachment between you and your child.

When doing this, make sure that the ambient temperature is at a pleasant level. If you'd like to know more about baby massage, there are special books available on this subject. Some child healthcare clinics also give baby massage courses.

4.1.5 Taking a shower

You can also take a shower together with your baby. Some children really enjoy this, while others find it very stressful. Holding your child firmly will help him to feel safe and secure in the shower. Don't forget that the shower makes a lot of noise when it's turned on, and that everything sounds different as a result. Your baby may also get water in his ears, which will make it harder for him to hear. Try to make sure that the shower does not directly spray on his head. Use a softer setting if the stream of water is too powerful. If you aren't holding your baby directly under the water stream, make sure that he doesn't get cold. While you're in the shower, make sure he knows you're close to him by talking and singing to him. If you keep the mood relaxed, your child will soon come to enjoy himself.

If he seems ready for it, you can encourage him to touch the inside and the outside of the shower cubicle. The tap, the shower hose and the objects in the cubicle, such as shampoo and shower gel bottles, are all interesting for him to explore.

4.2 Dressing and undressing

Right from your baby's first day, dressing and undressing are part of the daily routine. As a parent you may be clumsy at first, but it quickly becomes second nature. Because it becomes so natural 33 to you, you may forget that it may not feel natural at all for your baby. This is particularly so if he can't see what's happening and what's going to happen. For small babies, it's useful to have the clothes laid out and ready. Tell your baby what you've picked up to put on him. Try to stick to a fixed order when dressing him. You can let an older child touch the clothing, pointing out that a pair of jeans feels different to socks or a bodysuit. Even though your child can't see, you can still tell him that he will be wearing the blue jeans and red t-shirt today. Some blind children may still have some colour

perception from very close up. In this way, children who can't see anything learn about the existence of colours.
Once your child is a toddler, he can regularly help to take clothes out of the cupboard or put them in the wash. This will help him to learn where the clean clothes are kept, and where they must go if they're dirty. Encourage your child if he wants to help with taking his socks off. Have him touch his feet with and without socks on.

4.3 Nappy changing

Children wear nappies until around the age of three years old. These need to be changed several times a day. This is no different for blind children than for sighted children. You generally change your baby's nappy on a changing table or in some other set place. It's a good idea to make this place recognisable to your baby by hanging up something that makes a sound, such as a music box or a wind chime. In the beginning, your baby will only listen to the sound the object makes, but when he's older he might like to touch or play with it himself. Although a young baby won't yet understand what you're saying to him, it's still a good idea to tell him that you're going to change his nappy. He experiences this talk as calming and will later come to recognise the words. Be careful not to have cold hands when you touch his bare skin, as this can startle him. A cold blob of cream on his bottom or a wet nappy wipe may have the same effect. You can prepare him for the sensation by letting him feel the cream or wipe on the top of his hands.

Once your child is capable of grasping things, give him the clean nappy to hold so that he can touch it and listen to the sound it makes. Let him smell the cream and

the nappy wipes that you use. How does his dirty nappy smell when it needs to be changed?
Nappy changing time is often a nice opportunity to make extra contact with your baby and to play games. If he's older than six months, he will enjoy playing with his feet without the 'hindrance' of the nappy. Lift his feet up so that he can take them in his hands and explore them. Don't be shocked if your child touches his genitals; they are also part of his body that he is exploring. Calmly name the parts that he's touching, and continue putting on his nappy.
Once your child can walk, you can have him help you throw away the dirty nappy or put it in a bucket. You can also open a pack of nappies together. He will soon understand where the nappies come from and where they go when they're dirty.

4.4 Hair brushing

Some children are born with a lot of hair, while others remain bald throughout their first year. Sooner or later though, every child has to have their hair brushed. Before brushing your child's hair, it's important to tell him what you're going to do. When your baby is a little older, you can let him touch the comb or brush. Once he's ready, he can try using it himself, either on you, on a doll or on himself. You can also tell him what you're doing when you're combing or brushing your own hair. He will eventually understand that this is an activity that everyone does on a daily basis. In order to help it become second nature, you can choose to do it at a fixed time, for example once you've finished with getting dressed.
If you are going to put hair clips and ties in your child's hair, announce this beforehand and let him touch them first. Keep the comb, brush, hair ties and clips in the same place if possible, so that your child will learn where they come from and where he will be able to find them himself in the future. Fetch these items together with your child as often as possible. This will help him to understand where everything comes from, and to learn that everything doesn't just come to him.

4.5 Brushing teeth

As soon as your child's first teeth appear, they will need to be cleaned. For a child who has never seen someone else brushing their teeth, suddenly having a toothbrush in his mouth can be a strange sensation.
It's a good idea to give your child the toothbrush beforehand so that he can explore it extensively with his mouth and hands. Toothpaste can come later. When you're brushing your own teeth, allow your child to feel what you're doing and smell the toothpaste. What does it sound like when someone brushes their teeth? What does the toothpaste smell like? Once you're ready to brush your child's teeth, explain clearly what you're going to do and then first touch your child's lips

with the toothbrush. If your child has a brother or sister, they can brush their teeth together. If your child is already almost a toddler, tooth brushing will be about more than just moving the toothbrush around in his mouth. Putting toothpaste on the toothbrush and cleaning the toothbrush afterwards are also part of the whole activity. Where is the toothbrush kept, who do the other toothbrushes belong to, and where does he need to put the toothpaste? If your child is able to hold the brush himself, you can also let him brush his teeth himself.
Your child will understand tooth brushing best if it always takes place in the same place and at the same time, such as in the bathroom after getting dressed and undressed.

4.6 Nose wiping

Small children often have the sniffles, and wiping their noses is often just an automatic thing that you do quickly between other activities. Because your blind child can't see you coming with the handkerchief, he may be startled to suddenly feel it on his face. You can prevent this by telling him calmly beforehand that you're going to wipe his nose with a handkerchief. When he's older, he may well want to help or do it himself. It's best to use unscented tissues, as the fragrance of a lotion tissue can linger for a long time and hinder his ability to smell other things.

4.7 Clipping nails

Caring for your baby also involves clipping his nails regularly. When you want to do so, explain to him briefly what you're about to do. Once your child is older, you can allow him to carefully touch and handle the nail clippers. Where possible, always clip his nails at a set place and time. This will make nail clipping a somewhat predictable activity, and the regular repetition will help your child become used to it.

4.8 Hair cuts

At first, getting his hair cut will feel very strange to your blind child. Because he can't see other people getting their hair cut, it will be hard for him to understand why it's necessary. Prior to getting your child's hair cut, you can explain what is going to happen. Encourage him to touch his hair. Once he's a little older, he will better understand when you explain to him.
Playing nice music or reading a story to your child might help him to sit still. Keep explaining what you're doing. When you visit the hairdressing salon, it's important to allow your child enough time to get used to the unfamiliar surroundings and

items. "Hey, here's a high chair that can turn around, and that strange noise you can hear is a hairdryer."
Try to go to the hairdresser a little early, so that it's not your child's turn right away. That gives him the chance to get used to the new surroundings. Perhaps he will even be able to try out the special chair and touch some of the hairdryer's equipment. Tell the hairdresser that your child can't see, and allow them enough time to get to know each other. It's important for your child to know who is going to be touching his head and cutting his hair. Tell your child yourself, or have the hairdresser explain what is going to happen next. 'Marije, first I'm going to spray your hair with a little water. Here, you can feel it.' And once that's happened: 'Now I'm going to comb your hair.' Small children can't comprehend a whole series of announcements, so it's best to describe what's going to happen step by step. If things go well with the hairdresser who cuts your child's hair, ask for his or her name so that you can book the same one next time. It's much more pleasant for your child to have his hair cut by the same person each time.
If having his hair cut is extremely unpleasant for your child, remain calm and complete only what is absolutely necessary. Give your child compliments about what went well. It's a good idea to take your blind child along to the hairdresser when he doesn't need a haircut, but his father, brother or sister does. This will help him to realise that everyone goes to the hairdresser from time to time, and it will eventually become just another habit.

4.9 Accidents

Unfortunately, little accidents happen in all families. Your child might get his finger caught in the door, or bump or cut himself on something. Explain to your child what's happened. You may sometimes need to apply a plaster. For a blind child, this can feel overwhelming. 'Where did that thing come from all of a sudden, and why is it staying stuck to me?' Some children really dislike this. They find it unpleasant to have something stuck to them, and don't understand at all why it's necessary. Give your child plenty of time to get used to a plaster. Where are the sticky edges , what does it feel and smell like? Stick a plaster on yourself and encourage your child to touch it. Once he's a little bigger, he can try putting a plaster on you or himself, even if it's not necessary at that moment. Put together a box of various plasters, cotton wool and bandages. Your child can play with these items and get used to them so that he's already familiar with them when they need to be used.

4.10 Toilet training

In general, children become toilet-trained between their second and third year. Before that time, they have no control over the muscles that they need to use for

this. You can make a gradual transition from nappies to using the toilet by introducing your blind child to the potty or toilet from an age of around one-and-a-half years. This will help him understand what's expected of him when the time comes.

If your child has an older brother or sister who uses the potty or toilet, it will be easier for him to get an idea of what it's all about. Involve him in what happens, take him along to the toilet if you're going yourself, or let him touch the potty. It's best to let him touch the toilet right after you've cleaned it. Let him get used to the other sounds in that small room. Touch the toilet roll together, the basin and the hand towel hanging beside it. Explain what everything's for. By walking along the walls and making sounds, your child can discover how big or small the toilet area is.

Summer is a good season to let your child wander around outside with no nappy on. This will help him to get an idea of where his pee comes from. Have the potty ready nearby, so that you can sit your toddler on it as soon as you notice that he is about to pee or poop.

To begin toilet training, you can put him on the potty at a set time, for example in the morning when he usually gets dressed. It doesn't matter if nothing happens at first, and you don't need to wait for something to come. Take a fixed amount of time – a couple of minutes is fine – and then let him come off the potty again. Praise him enthusiastically if he's done something.

5 Eating and drinking

Lisa is having her first fruit snack, which her mother made herself. Lisa repeatedly spits out the food. Her mother doesn't understand why she does this. She thought that Lisa would like it.

Drinking is a skill that most babies master right from birth. In the beginning, smelling things and feeling them with his mouth will be your baby's most important sources of information. He will learn the smell of his mother's milk and learn to crawl towards the breast or bottle and latch onto it.
At some point, sighted children realise that they are about to get a drink when they see the breast or bottle approaching. Your blind baby, however, can't see this. You can still prepare him by using his other senses. This will help him to become actively involved in drinking and to understand the whole process. An explanation follows below.

5.1 Nutrition in the first months

Your baby will often realise that he's about to get something to drink by the way he's being held. When offering the bottle, you can also make use of the other senses that give your baby information. For example, you can allow him to touch the bottle in advance, preferably with the top of his hands as the inside of his hands will be very sensitive. After that, first let him smell the milk, then apply a little to his lips with the dummy. Then touch the corner of his mouth to encourage your baby to actively gape in the direction of the dummy. Try to describe what you're doing as much as possible, preferably using the same short sentences. Your baby will come to understand what you mean.
You can proceed in much the same way when breastfeeding, by first letting your baby feel the breast and then encouraging him to actively gape towards the nipple.

Holding the bottle himself
As your baby develops further, he will try to help hold the bottle. You may need to help him with this by trying the following manner:

- Use a bottle that isn't too heavy at first.
- Perhaps use a bottle with a shape that makes it easier to hold, and explain what is happening.
- Take your child onto your lap with his back against your belly. This is the best position for guiding his hands.
- Place your child's hands around the bottle and hold it together with him. Place your hands around his hands and allow your child to slowly take the weight of the bottle.
- Bring the bottle slowly to his mouth.
- Let him touch and feel the whole bottle.

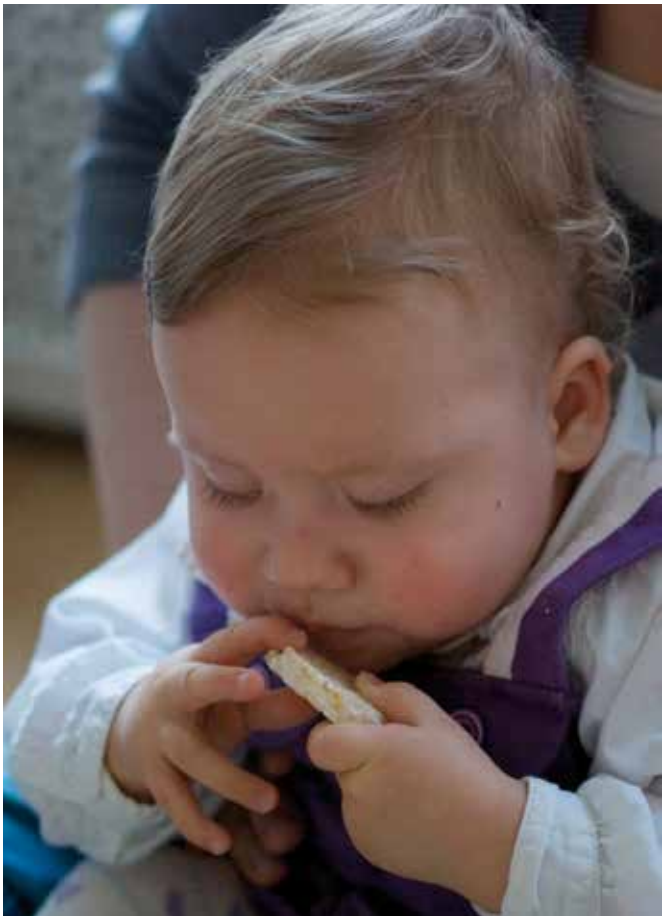
In time, your child will be able to do more and more himself.

Where does the bottle come from?
A baby can be taught from a young age about where his drink comes from. You can do this by involving him in the preparations. If you have a bottle of milk in the refrigerator, let him feel the cold of the refrigerator and hear the opening and shutting of the microwave oven door. If you use water in the preparation of powdered formula, let your baby feel and hear the running water and the sound of the kettle or the bottle warmer.
Where is the kitchen and where is the living room? Allow your baby to experience the distance between these rooms by carrying him along with you. Try to do many movements together, whilst explaining what's happening.
If your child can move his arms freely while in a sitting position, teach him to pick up his bottle from the table. Do this together at first. Tap on the bottle to let him hear where it is. This will help your child to learn to reach in the direction of a sound. He will also learn that a bottle can stand on a table and doesn't hang in the air. After finishing, put the bottle down on the table again together, so that your child learns that the bottle stays somewhere.

5.2 Solid food

A child eats with his mouth, and one of the main functions of his mouth is touch. This helps to protect him against potential harm while eating, such as when he encounters milk that is too warm. When a sighted child gets something new to eat like a crust of bread, he will first examine it from all angles, smell it and watch to see if others are eating it before daring to put it in his own mouth.
A blind baby lacks a lot of this information. Switching over from the bottle to solid foods can therefore be a difficult process for him. He has to use his other senses in order to dare to try new foods. There are a number of ways in which you can encourage your child. Exploring the food first with his hands allows your child to gather information about its texture and temperature before putting it into his mouth. This applies not only to a crust of bread, but naturally also to a fruit or vegetable snack. Children often put their own fruit-covered fingers in their mouths. It can sometimes help to warm up the fruit snack a little in the beginning, so that there isn't such a great difference in temperature between the bottle feed and the new food.
Allow your child to smell the food. In time, he will learn to recognise food by its odour and will know what he's about to eat. You can let him know that food is coming by first touching his lip with the spoon. As you do so, tell him what it is. For an older child, you can be a little more detailed. Meat isn't just meat, but mince or a piece of sausage. It's nice for him if you announce the arrival of the spoon in his mouth with the same word or phrase, for example, 'here comes a mouthful'. You can describe the flavour of the food to an older child. A cookie is sweet and yoghurt is sour.

In general, your blind child will enjoy eating food with an obvious texture – smooth or solid – if he's old enough for this. He may have difficulties with pureed food that still has lumps in it. This is due to the sensitivity of his mouth and the fact that he can't see that there are lumps in his food. Bottled baby food is usually very smooth. If you make your own food for your child, you might consider sieving the food as well as pureeing it.
Bread crusts, ladyfingers and breadsticks are ideal for letting your child get used to solid food. He can hold these in his hand himself , giving him control over his own food rather than it just being something that's put into his mouth. You may need to do this together in the beginning, because your child won't realise at first that he can eat the breadstick. After all, he's never seen someone else do that.
Wiping his mouth after eating can often be an unexpected and unpleasant experience for your child. By allowing him to touch the cloth with his hands and announcing: 'I'm going to wipe your mouth', the touch won't be so startling to him. Firmly dabbing around the mouth is often more pleasant than wiping. Be aware that ready-to-use wet wipes often have a strong odour which can be unpleasant for your child.



5.3 Eating and drinking himself

Before you start teaching your child how to eat and drink, you should give him the opportunity to extensively explore the utensils he will be using. As preparation for independent eating and drinking, encourage him to play with the spoon, plate and cup. What are the top and bottom of the utensils, how do they feel? You can also let him play with a cup in the bath. In order for your child to be able to focus fully on the food and on what is happening around him, it's important that he isn't distracted by unnecessary ambient sounds. Remember to switch off the radio, TV or stereo.

It's important for your child to have a good opportunity to eat with his hands before you teach him to eat with a spoon. He can gather a lot of information through touch and there's a good chance that he will dare to try a lot more things simply because he can first feel what he's about to put in his mouth.

Carrying out the whole procedure of taking a sip or bite together with your child will help him to understand the process. You can help your child to experience an action by putting your own hands over your child's hands, and then directing his actions. You carry out the movement together. If your child is sitting in a high chair, go and stand behind him to guide his hands. Another possibility is to let your child sit on your lap at the table. Once your child is better able to control his movements, you can direct his actions by his wrists and then later by his elbows. Let him also feel how you drink and eat yourself, and the items you use for this. It's not obvious to a blind child that others also drink out of cups, mugs or glasses and eat from plates or bowls.

Below are some more ideas for helping the whole process go as smoothly as possible:

- Consider skipping the step between bottle and sippy cup and instead teach your child to drink out of a normal cup straight away, as blind children sometimes have difficulty with transitions.
- When teaching your child to drink independently, it's easier for your child if you use a half-full cup instead of a full one. It will also be easier for him to learn to drink a thicker fluid from a cup, such as yoghurt, than a thin fluid such as juice or milk.
- While he's drinking, let your child feel whether the cup is full or empty. Can you hear the drink being poured into the cup? What does the fluid feel like, and how heavy is a full cup?
- It's best to use a baby spoon with the bowl of the spoon at right angles to the handle, so that your child will not need to rotate his wrist to put the spoon in his mouth. These baby spoons are readily available from shops.
- Teach your child to eat from a plate as this will be expected of him when he's older. Furthermore, a plate forms a defined area where he can easily find his food.
- Use an anti-slip mat under the plate or bowl to prevent it sliding around on the surface beneath it.
- Encourage your child to touch the high chair tray or the table. This helps him learn that his spoon, plate and cup aren't just hanging in the air, but have a set place in which he can find them and pick them up again.

Naturally, your child doesn't have to eat his whole meal independently in the beginning. Start with a couple of bites and gradually extend this.

5.4 Sitting at the table

At some point, your child will come to eat at the table with the rest of the family. During mealtimes, there is generally a fixed order of activities. It's a good idea to consciously stick to this order, as this will help your child to understand what is to come. If everyone sits in the same place at the table, your child will have a sense of where everyone is. You might like to walk around the table with him so that he can experience it from close up. Name the sounds associated with eating, such as putting plates on the table, pouring drinks and serving up the food. It's a good idea to clearly indicate when the food and drink is finished. After all, your child can't see what's happening around him and what he's waiting for. If the other family members are still eating and your child is already finished, give him something to play with. Finally, in learning to eat and drink independently, it's only through much repetition and practice that your child will master the skills. Therefore, don't give up too quickly if he doesn't succeed after a couple of tries. Accidents will happen of course, such as a full cup toppling over. You can lay a

large sheet of plastic or some old newspapers under the high chair so that it doesn't matter if your child spills things while practising.

6 Your child and his environment

Now that Suze is just walking, she wants to keep going into the hall to stamp on the wooden floor. Her father keeps bringing her back to the living room again and puts her on the rug.

As the parents of a blind baby, you hope that your child will eventually be able to find his way independently in society. Important conditions for this are things like your child having the courage to enter a space, being curious about the world around him, and seeking out new challenges. Encourage your child to discover his environment for himself. Being able to do something, even if it's something small, gives children a strong feeling of self-worth. A blind baby who gets to know his environment and the people around him well will mostly feel safe enough to move around. He will enter a space to feel, pick up or explore something. Through playing and with the help of others, he can learn about where he is. In short, he will learn how to orient himself.

6.1 Orientation

The dictionary definition of orientation includes 'investigating a place, or determining where you are'. There is a big difference between blind and sighted children in terms of the way in which they orient themselves. Sighted children see at a glance where they are, how they can get somewhere, and whether someone else is nearby.
This is not self-evident for blind children. They need another way of learning how to get a sense of place by literally touching their surroundings, or by listening to the sounds they can hear. This takes longer than for a sighted child, who can understand things much more rapidly simply by looking. Exploring by using the sense of touch also takes much more time. After all, a first touch is not enough. By touching separate items, your child will eventually form an impression of the whole.
Over time, a blind child will orient himself in a variety of ways, namely:
In terms of people: who is located where?
In terms of the space: where is he located within the space?
In terms of items: what is there around him?
In terms of time: when is it morning or afternoon, day or night?

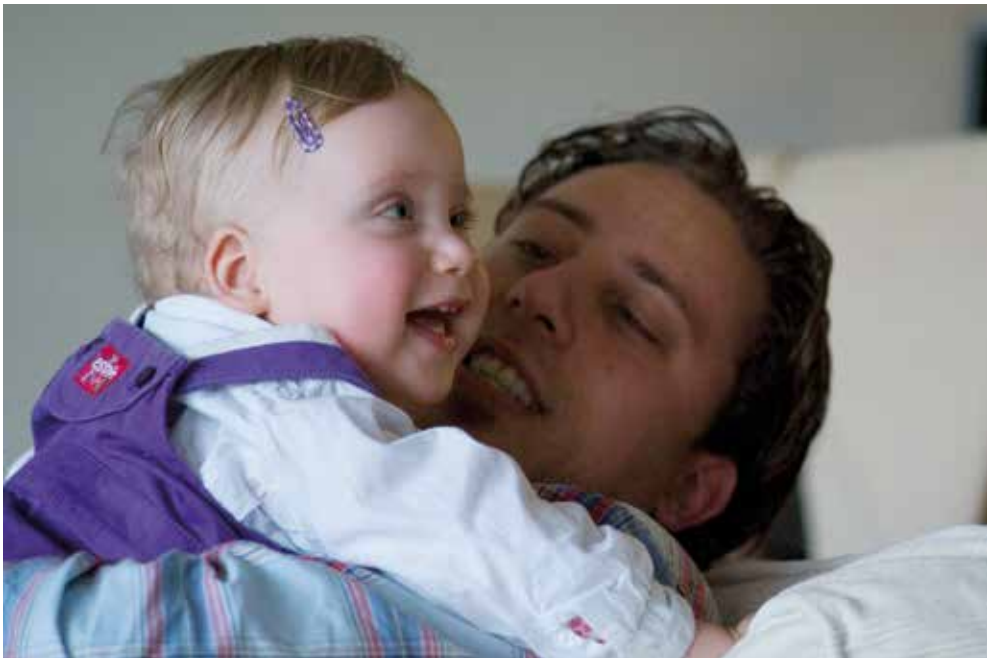
6.1.1 Orientation in terms of other people (who)

For a young blind baby, exploring his own body and that of his father and mother is of primary importance. After all, this is where the world begins for him. For a long time he feels at one with his parents. It is difficult for him to make a distinction between himself and his father or mother, because he cannot see himself and his parents. Your baby will gain experience in this by playing with his own body and touching others' bodies.

Ideas to try
The following ideas may help to promote your child's awareness of his own body.

For the young baby:

- Massage your baby, alternating between putting soft and somewhat harder pressure on his body. It's nice to use massage oil for this. You can also massage him through his clothes.
- Give your baby the chance to feel his whole body in contact with you or with various surfaces. Lay him on your stomach or take him onto your lap. Lay your baby on different kinds of surfaces, such as a rug, a towel, the carpet or a sheepskin. Without socks on, your child can explore the ground even better with his bare feet.
- Move your baby by walking around with him in your arms, rocking him, or carrying him on your forearm.
- Allow him to experience his body by playing games like 'round and round the garden'. You can also blow on his belly.



- Lay him in a different position in his playpen, for example on his back, stomach or side. You can also position a rolled up towel behind his back while he's lying on his side, to prevent him rolling onto his back. If you fold his play mat back a little, he can trample his feet on the wooden surface beneath, which makes an interesting sound.
- Sing lap and cradle songs while rocking your baby in time with the song.
- Let your child touch your face. You can also do this together by guiding your child's hand. If you repeat this frequently, your child will come to recognise your face.

For toddlers:

- Bounce your child up and down on your lap while singing to him. The ‘Smooth Road’ song is a well-known example.
- Play around with your child on the big bed. When doing so, keep announcing what you’re going to do: ‘I’m going to tickle you!’
- Sit on the floor with your child between your legs. You can sway together from side to side, topple over sideways together, spin around together and shuffle along through the room together.
- Give your child horse rides on your back from the moment that he can sit up well. Make sure to support him well so that he can’t fall.

In the first year of life, the baby needs the voice and touch of his parents to know that they are nearby. For that reason, it’s pleasant for him if you talk to him and touch him regularly. This also applies when taking him out for a walk in the pushchair. If your baby can’t hear you, he may become afraid because he thinks that you’re no longer close by.
Be aware that radio and television sounds make it more difficult for him to hear you and to orient himself towards the voices of familiar people.
A somewhat older child will call out to you himself to hear where you are. It’s nice for him when you tell him where you are or where you’re going, such as: ‘I’m just going to the kitchen.’

6.1.2 Orientation in terms of space (where)

A sighted child learns what space is by looking around him. A blind child often struggles to give meaning to the concept of space. In order to perceive where he is located in a space, he first has to understand what 'space' actually is. After all, he can't see this. By making a space literally tangible for your child, you will enable him to build up an understanding and impression of it. You can achieve this by reducing and defining a space, or by allowing your child to play in a fixed place that is not too large. An additional advantage of playing in a smaller space is that your child can find his toys more easily.

Ideas for small spaces:

You can use the materials below to make a small space in which your baby can play:

- Playpen. Fasten items in the corners of the playpen so that the baby can learn to recognise them when he feels them, such as a soft toy, tambourine, rattle. This will help him to know where he is in the playpen. Alternate between putting your baby in the playpen lengthways and crossways, so that he can get to know the playpen from different positions.
- Hammock. You can hang up a baby hammock in your child's playpen.
- Baby bath or large, sturdy crate. A baby bath on the ground with no water in it is a great place for your child to play.
- Little room: a small space of a fixed size in which your child can sit. Various materials hang from the top and different materials are used to make the side walls. The little room is open at the front.

For a baby who can sit well and move about, you can also consider the following:

- Large box, crate or washing basket.
- Small tent.
- Sandpit without sand.
- Inflatable pool or baby bath without water.
- Boundary ring: a large ring of foam rubber used to define a space.

As your child grows, he will move around more through his surroundings. His environment will become larger and he will perceive it differently. Encourage your child to touch what he encounters and name it. 'You just rolled up against the table, and this is a table leg. Feel how hard it is.' Go and sit at a short distance from your child and invite him to come towards you by calling his name. In the beginning, you can also briefly touch him while doing this. Always make sure that you don't increase the distance in the meantime. This may confuse your child, while you actually want to teach him how to make a good estimate of the distance between you and him, based on the sound of your voice.

Once he can walk, you can regularly explore the room in which you often spend time together. Choose a safe path and always leave from the same starting point. Go all the way around the room along the walls. That will give your child an idea of the space he's in. Clearly tangible landmarks will help him to eventually find his own way. For example, the couch, or a rug on the ground. A toy cupboard or the transition from carpet to bare floor can also be clearly recognisable. Even smells and noises in a room are very helpful to him. The bathroom smells different to the kitchen in which something is being cooked at that moment. The beeping of the microwave oven indicates the place where milk is warmed up, and the sound of the clock is in the living room.

Echolocation

Echolocation is a way of using the hearing to compensate for the lack of sight. Your child does this by using sound that bounces off obstacles. He does so by making clicking sounds with his mouth, clapping his hands or stamping his feet. Some blind children do this of their own accord, while others are taught to do so. By listening carefully to the echo, it's possible to hear where an obstacle is located and even what it is. The echo from a wall sounds different to one from a hedge. The ability to hear such differences can help a blind person to determine where he is, where he's walking and what there is around him.

For young children, this is still too difficult. As well as feeling his way around a space, your child will gradually also gain an understanding of the space if you make it audible for him. This can be done in the following manner: • Play different sound and echo games with your child. Make loud noises together, for example clapping or calling out in the bathroom in or in a long corridor.

- Stamp your feet close to a wall and then further away from it.
- Make sounds by clicking your tongue, hissing or saying 'Hello' with a tray right in front of your faces and then a little further away.
- Make sounds in a large bucket.
- Make sounds in a corner, facing towards the wall first and then away from the wall.
- Make sounds under the table and then next to the table.

From an early age, your child can be made aware of the sounds that can be heard in different rooms. 'We're in the bathroom now, and it sounds different here than in the corridor.' Or: 'We're standing under the canopy at the front door, can you hear what that sounds like?'

6.1.3 Orientation in terms of items (what is there around him?)

Blind children have to learn where things are around them in relation to their bodies. How far away is the bottle, where is my stuffed toy and can I roll over without bumping into something?
For blind babies up to six months of age, the sound of a toy has no meaning yet. They do not yet reach for something as a response to sound. The combination of hearing and touch is necessary to understand that there is something to look for. This means that you will have to do a lot together with your baby. You can touch his hands or feet with sound-making toys such as crinkle books, empty crisp packets, a soft inflated beach ball with rice in it, or squeaky animals. After a while, try to increase the distance between your child's hands or feet and the item to prompt your child to reach out towards the sound. You can help by guiding your child's hands or feet with your own hands.

At around one year old, your child will seek out his favourite toy for himself when he hears it. After that, he will also move himself in order to get somewhere.

In exploring all kinds of material, blind babies are very dependent on what they are offered and what they come into contact with. A restricted environment, such as those described above, makes it easier for your baby to find his toys. Toys that make sounds or feel nice to touch will be of interest to him, such as rattles, objects with bells attached, a book with crackling pages or items that vibrate or make cracking noises.

Ideas to try:

- Stretch a piece of buttonhole elastic over your baby's playpen and attach items that make noises. Your baby will be excited if he comes across these items by chance with his arms and hands. Eventually, your baby will seek out this excitement for himself. Rattles, a windchime and a bag containing nuts or bells are examples of items that can be hung from the elastic.
- Go in search of noise-making items together, such as a ball with a bell in it. This is especially fun if your child can move by himself. Hold the ball close at first, and then further away.
- Put your baby's bottle down on the table with a tap and guide his hands to it.
  • If your baby is sitting on your lap and something falls, make the movement to pick it up together with him.

6.1.4 Orientation in terms of time (when)

Babies have no concept of time at first. Most things just seem to happen to them. By making use of fixed rituals, such as songs, you can help your baby to recognise when something is going to happen. An example is putting on some music when you lay him down in his cot to sleep. This will help him to feel safer. Be aware that a regular daily routine can help an older baby to get a grip on what's going to happen. In particular, set eating and sleeping times help to give a sense of time. For example, bread is eaten at midday and hot food in the evening. Your baby will only realise after a lot of repetition that there is a set order to the events that take place during a day. 52

7 Movement

Lars is six months old. When he sits on his mother's lap, he holds his head upright just fine. When he's lying on his stomach in the playpen, however, it's impossible to get him to lift his head.

We all know how much young babies enjoy being picked up and carried around. Most young babies like to be moved around, and are only later able to move around by themselves. A toddler aged one-and-a half years has generally already learned to crawl and is often taking his first steps. Your blind baby will also like to move and be moved around. However, the spontaneous will to move himself is not as strong in him. He will be less stimulated to lift up his head and to reach out to toys or familiar people, because he can't see them. Rolling over and moving forwards will be difficult for the same reasons. He will need a lot of support and help from you to learn this.

7.1 Being moved

A newborn baby's first experiences of movement are being picked up, carried around and rocked. Not all blind babies enjoy this. They have to get used to the way their head changes position in space. Try to give your baby pleasant experiences of being moved around. Body contact, hugging, talking to your baby or singing him songs while playing movement games can help with this. Approaching your baby from the front helps him to discover where physical contact is going to begin, especially if you introduce this by saying his name and talking to him. This is how you can spark your child's own initiative. He may eventually stretch his arms out towards you when you start talking to him.

7.1.1 The first months

In the first months, you'll have a lot of body contact with your baby and this will be very important for him. You can move your baby during this body contact.

Ideas for moving him include:

- Carrying him in a sling.
- Rocking him back and forth.
- Lifting him up and putting him down. You can lift your child if he's lying on his back, but first turn him onto his side or stomach before picking him up. The same applies to putting him down. Regularly lay him down on his side or back instead of on his stomach. In doing this, remember that your baby has two sides and alternate between them accordingly.
- Carry him along on your shoulder or lower arm with your baby lying on his stomach.
- Swing your baby in a hammock.
- Pedal his feet back and forth while he's lying on his back, on your lap or on a cushion. Your baby will like it if you sing while doing this.
- Lay him on his stomach over your legs and move your legs gently from side to side.
- Curl and extend each of his fingers, one by one. You can do this once your child has opened his hands a bit more.

- Pull him up into a sitting position. Lay your baby on his back and take him by his arms. Carefully pull him upright while encouraging him to sit up. You should only do this once your baby can lift his head up himself to some extent.
- Rock back and forth while the baby sits on your lap with his back against you.
- Go for walks with the pushchair.

7.1.2 The older baby

Once your baby can sit up and move his arms and legs more smoothly, this broadens the possibilities for movement. For example, there are lap games like 'Stop and Go', 'Patty Cake', 'Ride a Little Pony' and 'Itsy Bitsy Spider'. There are many games that involve you singing a song while moving parts of your baby's body. Babies often enjoy these touch-oriented games very much.
Many children also enjoy dancing or jumping up and down. If you pick your baby up under his arms, he will let himself sink at the knees and then push off again by straightening his legs. You can try to find out whether your child likes to 'fly' above your head. Carefully observe his reaction. He may find it a little scary at first. Your child will often play on a soft surface, such as a playpen rug. When the surface is harder, such as when the playpen rug is partially rolled back, your child will hear and experience his movement in a different manner.

7.1.3 Toddlers

In addition to what's already been mentioned, a toddler may really enjoy playing around on a soft surface, such as a large bed. While he's sitting, you can topple him over, or roll him over if he's lying down. You can also turn him around or pick him up and gently 'throw' him away. After all, the surface is nice and soft and safe. Always tell your child what you're going to do beforehand, so he doesn't feel startled. These games will help him to gain experience in keeping his balance, and falling and catching himself.

Other movement games include:

- Sit cross-legged and take your toddler onto your lap. Rock from side to side, left to right. You can also rock backwards and forwards, and topple over sideways together. In doing so, you can 'direct' his arm so that he learns how to catch himself.
- Lay him on an inflated airbed and make the airbed move by pushing on it.
- Put your toddler in a large box or crate and move it back and forth.
- Pull your child around the room on a blanket.
- Let your child rock in a swing. You could hang a swing indoors in a doorway. Hang the swing low enough that he can touch the ground with his feet.
- Go down a slide together.
- Give him 'horsie rides' on your back, starting out on your stomach at first and then gradually getting higher from the ground.

A toddler can generally already sit reasonably well. This is a good time to put him in the baby back carrier or in a chair on the front of your bike. This will allow him to feel the motion of walking or cycling, while still being close enough to hear you properly.

7.2 Independent movement

For a baby to learn how to move independently, he needs support and encouragement. A sighted baby lifts his head up to better see his environment. Later on he grasps at toys that he can see or wants to move towards something. A blind baby is not prompted by his environment in this way. He has to learn that there's much to explore, as long as he moves in whatever way possible. Blind children generally move less than sighted children. Your child's movements may not look free or smooth. He may also have trouble transitioning from one posture to another, such as from lying on his back to sitting upright.
There are three phases in the development of movement in a blind child (M. Vink, 1994), namely:
1. Holding.
2. Letting go.
3. Acting independently.

All of the different phases are explained below, along with ways that you as parent can encourage your child to move, step by step. In all of the phases, it's important that you adapt to what your child needs. Don't start too early with the next step. Give your child the feeling of safety that he needs in order to start moving. You can give him this safety by holding him a lot at the start, then letting him go more and more until he can move independently.

7.2.1 Holding

At this stage, the baby makes all of his movements with as much contact possible between his body and the surface beneath him. This surface can be anything: the playpen, his bed, a baby chair or hammock, or a parent's body. While in contact with the surface beneath him, your baby will discover his hands, arms, feet and legs. You can encourage him in this by using sounds, touch and movement. It's nicest for your child if he's not too heavily dressed, so that he can move freely. Preferably also remove your baby's socks and shoes, so that he can feel well with his feet.

Ideas to try:

- Put a wristband on your baby with a little bell on it, either on his wrist or ankle. When he waves his hands or kicks his feet, he will hear a noise and this will help him to become aware of his own movements. A piece of aluminium rescue blanket between his hands or under his feet has the same effect due to the nice crackling sound that it makes. Help your baby to experience that things that make noise are also things he can pick up for himself. You can do this by first placing them in his hands, and then later letting him hear the sound they make at a distance.
- Massage his hands and feet, kiss them or blow on them. Allow your child to feel his feet with his own hands.
- Put your baby on his side or in a hammock in his playpen. This increases the chance that he will discover his own hands. When he's in this position, his shoulders and arms come more forward, bringing his hands together. Lay your baby on his side, and lay a rolled up towel behind him to preventing rolling onto his back again.

- When your child actively starts waving his arms around, fasten a play arch or a baby gym above the playpen. Attach items that feel different and that make sounds. This could include rattles, a fabric bag containing walnuts, a stuffed toy ball with a bell inside it, a half-inflated beach ball with rice inside it, or a crinkle book. At first, hang these items within easy reach of his hands. Instead of a play arch, you can also stretch a thick piece of buttonhole elastic over the playpen to which you can attach toys.
- Lay something in the playpen that your baby can reach if he's kicking his feet. A beach ball with a bell or an inflatable roller are suitable for this.

You can vary between all of the above examples by using different surfaces and positions. This could include a sheepskin, towel, rug, putting the baby on his back, stomach or side, or leaning your baby against you in a sitting position. By restricting the size of the place in which your baby is lying, you will give him a greater chance of encountering his toys with his hands and feet. It's also important to keep ambient sounds to a minimum so that you child can clearly hear which noises he makes himself. For example, you could switch off the radio and TV while your child is actively playing.

Rolling over

Once your baby can grasp his feet, he will also roll over. At first he will roll from his back to his stomach, and later the other way around. In the beginning, he will roll onto his own arm and won't be able to pull it out from under himself. You can help him by bringing his arms up next to his ears, which will make it easier for him to roll over. Once your child has mastered this movement, try to encourage him to roll towards you by making sounds next to him. It's fun to do this by singing songs to him. After he rolls over, your voice will come from a completely 58 different direction. This means your child will have to discover where you are all over again.

Sitting

Your baby will have to discover what sitting actually is, and you can help him by encouraging him to try out this movement. After all, he can't imitate others by watching them. Have him sit on your lap or between your legs while you're sitting on the ground yourself. You can also sit him down on the edge of the table while supporting him. At some point, you'll put your child down on the ground and you'll notice that he's able to sit by himself. He will do this with his legs spread to create as large a support surface as possible, and he will keep his upper body stiff. Now he has to learn to keep his balance. Placing him on a flat and sturdy surface will make this easier for him. If you sit behind him with your legs open and extended, he can support himself on your stomach or legs if he topples over. Placing a cushion behind his back and to his side is another way of ensuring that he doesn't hurt himself if he topples over. Once your child's back is strong enough, he may find it fun to sit inside the inner tube of a car tyre or in a cardboard box. The box and the inner tube provide him with support and challenge him to play.

For example, you can tap or scratch on them. Furthermore, the toys you place in there with him will stay close to him.

7.2.2 Letting go

During this phase, your baby will vary his position more. He needs less support, and is becoming better at keeping his balance. He will sit up, or raise himself onto his hands and knees.

Lying on the stomach

It's only during this stage that your baby, while lying on his stomach, will lift up his head and then his chest. All of this will happen somewhat later than for sighted babies, usually after nine months. Sighted babies lift up their heads to see something. A blind baby turns his ear towards a sound.

Put your baby on his stomach and go and sit or lie close by, right in front of him. Talk to him, blow softly on his face or tickle him under his chin to encourage him to lift up his head. You can make it easier for him by putting a rolled up towel under his chest. Another possibility is to put him on his stomach on your chest, and sit half upright yourself. You can also lay your child on his stomach over your knees. This is a playful way for him to get used to lying on his stomach and it's important because this position helps to develop his back muscles. At the same time, it's preparation for rolling over, sitting up and crawling.

Once he can lift up his head, try putting his bent arms under his chest so that he can lift himself up even further. You can encourage him in this by talking to him or

making sounds. Put toys down for him that he can hit, such as a pillow case stuffed with crackling paper, a biscuit tin or a tambourine.

Sitting up
Once your baby can sit up, encourage him to reach out and touch you or a toy that makes a sound. You can offer this to him from the front or from the side. This will bring him out of balance a little. Try holding your child's arms and rocking him from left to right and forwards and backwards. Help him to touch the floor to the left and right. This type of game teaches him to find and restore his balance. You can gradually increase the distance. Eventually, your child will dare to topple over and will learn to catch himself using his arms. The next step is for him to push himself back into an upright sitting position. Later he will learn to go from rolling over to sitting upright.

On hands and knees
Your child will progress from the prone position to supporting himself on his hands and knees. He will move back and forth in this position because the this movement is enjoyable to him.

Pulling himself up and standing independently
From early on, let your child experience standing on his own two feet and supporting himself. You can do this by holding him firmly under his arms and letting him stand with his feet in your lap. Once your child can sit up a little, take him onto your lap facing towards you and pull him slowly upright by his arms. Give him a kiss or hug and let him sit down again slowly. At first, your child will do this with stiff legs, but after a while he will bend and stretch his legs. By talking above the head of your child at an angle, and by touching him, you will encourage him to move upwards. Other ideas to encourage him to stand up include:

- If your child is on his hands and knees, pull him upright. To help him, first bring one of his knees forward and up (half-kneeling position) and only then pull him upright.
- Go and sit on your knees on the ground in front of your standing child. Put his hands on your upper legs, so that he stands bent over forwards. Then guide him to a kneeling position again. You can also do this the other way round. After much repetition, your child will learn to move his hands himself and to pull himself upright on your clothes.
- Kneel on the ground and have your child sit on one of your thighs, facing you. While holding on to you, he can pull himself into a standing position. Hold him firmly at first to support him while he continues to try. You will find he needs to hold on to you less and less.
- Try kneeling on the ground in front of the playpen. Sit your child on your thighs facing the playpen and guide his hands to the bars. Give him a little boost under his bottom until he stands up, and then let him sit down on your legs again.

- Put your child next to the playpen and guide both of his hands to the bars, so that his upper body rotates towards them. Bend his legs so that he's sitting next to them. From here you can give him a little boost under his bottom so that he ends up in a kneeling position. Bring one of his feet forward and push him up into a standing position. Then bring him back down again the same way.

Once your child has learned how to pull himself up into a standing position, offer him other things to pull himself up on, such as a sturdy chair or table.
When your child is firmly supported with both hands, encourage him to grasp an object with one hand, such as a rattle or a familiar soft toy. Afterwards, you can prompt him to grasp larger objects for which he needs to use both hands, such as a beach ball with rice inside it, or a balloon with a bell attached to it. Make sure that he can quickly find support if he loses balance. This could be you, but also a couch, sturdy chair or the bars of the playpen.

7.2.3 Acting independently

Your blind baby will now move around without help from you or others. He will creep, crawl and walk freely.

Crawling

Blind children frequently skip crawling or prefer to crawl backwards. After all, it's scary to enter a space head first and risk bumping it on something. Alternatively, your child may move about by shuffling along on his bottom.

Walking

Seeing your child start walking is very special. A blind child typically learns to walk later than a sighted child. After all, he has to learn to move forwards on small, wobbly feet while not being able to see where he's going. You can stand your child on your own feet and take steps together, so that he experiences what walking actually is. Once he's got used to that, you can support him in walking. In the beginning, it will give him a feeling of security if you hold both of his hands and stand in front of him. He can then walk towards you. Later on, you can lead him by one hand while he touches the couch, wall or the edge of the table with his other hand. You can gradually decrease the support you provide with your own hand. Tell him what he encounters with his other hand. If he's at the point where he can't quite walk independently yet, give him a push cart or a doll's pram. Make sure to weigh this down with something like a stone. This will prevent the pram or cart from rolling faster than your child can walk. The good thing is that this toy will protect your child against collisions. He will encounter all kinds of new things. 'Hey, you've just bumped into something. That's a door. Touch it, it can open and close.'

Walking independently mostly begins with taking sideways steps. A couch can help with this. Go and sit down next to your child and talk to him or briefly touch his arm to prompt him to come towards you. If your child has a favourite object that makes sound, then you can use this to encourage him to come to you. Stand your child against the couch, a chair or a wall, go and sit in front of him and encourage him to take a couple of steps towards you. Let him also hear your voice and touch him, so that he knows you're close by. Once your child can take a couple of steps unaided, start steadily increasing the distance. He will like coming towards the sound of your voice and being praised once he reaches you. The better your child can keep his balance while walking, the more you can vary the place you go to stand to call him. Try choosing a place next to or behind your child. This will help him learn to orient himself to the sound of your voice.

Once your child is walking reasonably stably and no longer needs support, it's a good idea to teach him to walk with his hands stretched out in front of him. This will be his first protection against colliding with obstacles. Many children do not do this of their own accord.

7.3 Falling

Everyone who has to learn something difficult needs lots of encouragement and affirmation. Your child may protest the learning of new movements. This is very normal in the beginning, and you shouldn't let it discourage you. Simply try again the next day. Every child learns by falling over and getting up again. Parents of blind children sometimes tend to protect their child from falling and catch the child before he falls. If you do this, your child will learn that there will always be someone waiting to catch him. Then, when he really does fall over, he may really hurt himself. Therefore, teach him how to fall by doing this when you are playing around together, such as those described earlier in this chapter. Support your child as he learns how to fall over. Pay attention as early as possible to moving from one position to another. This will prevent your child from becoming helplessly stuck in a sitting or standing position with nowhere to go.

8 Playing

Hanna is lying in a playpen full of toys. Her mother has just tidied it up and placed everything neatly around the edges of the playpen. Hanna lies still in the playpen and eventually falls asleep.

Children and play go together. Children play everywhere, at first mostly alone and then later with each other. In their play, children imitate what happens around them and make new discoveries. They become familiar with their surroundings. The most important thing for children is that playing should be fun and enjoyable! For young blind children, playing is mainly about exploring the world around them. The way a blind child plays looks different than the way a sighted child does. It takes him more time to discover everything around him and to play with it. He experiences the world around him in a different way. Blind children more often need help from adults to get started playing.
It's important for your child to receive lots of positive reactions to what he's doing. You can do this by praising him a lot, hugging him and encouraging him in what he's doing. 'In particular, the reactions that a child receives from people appear to maintain and reinforce the innate desire to explore and to achieve something.' (M. Riksen-Walraven, 1996)

It is typical for a blind baby not to play with toys on his own initiative. When he's lying or sitting listening to what's going on around him, he doesn't need toys. It may look like he's not doing anything. If he does have a toy, then he will spend a lot of time exploring it with his hands and mouth, making noises with it and smelling it. A sighted baby will first look at it and then try to grasp it and put it in his mouth. It's striking that a blind child will put objects in his mouth for much longer than his sighted peers. He does this partly because he can feel the object well with his mouth. Throwing away toys is an endless source of amusement for a young blind child. He listens to the sound that the toy makes when it lands on the wooden floor or on the rug. Later on, he learns that he can go looking for the toy, because he's heard where it landed.

8.1 Play in blind babies

In the first weeks after birth, your baby is mainly concerned with finding his balance and adjusting to the new outside world. He needs peaceful surroundings for this. Your baby mostly responds reflexively to external stimuli. Too many stimuli in this period may be disturbing to him. Real toys are barely necessary in the first months. During this period, it's important for parents to stay close to their child and observe him carefully, learning his responses. Your baby will increasingly start to explore his surroundings from this secure base. It's a good idea to place something that feels pleasant to the touch next to him, such as a cloth with a bell on it, or a soft toy. After a while, this will get its own scent, which will make the object very familiar to your child. Around the third or fourth month, your baby will enjoy playing with his own hands. You can help your child with this by bringing his hands together and touching, bending and softly rubbing the fingers one by one. He will also derive more pleasure from using his hands to grasp and hold things.

During this period, objects that are nice to hold and touch include pieces of cloth, such as a clean handkerchief, a facecloth or a washcloth, or small dolls or animals made of cloth, perhaps with a bell inside. Other lightweight toys that he won't hurt himself on are also suitable, such as a teething ring or a light rattle. A band around the wrist or ankle with a bell attached to it can give your child a lot of amusement. He will soon realise that he hears the bell when he moves his arm or leg, and this will help draw his attention to his limbs. A baby gym is recommended for young blind children. Your child won't be able to lose the toys that are hanging from it, they are always within his reach, and they always return to the same place after they've been struck. In this way, your child learns that his random actions can have an impact. Put the toys within easy reach , otherwise he will not know that he can play with them. The baby gym can be placed in the playpen, on a play mat or used with a baby bouncer. If you hang new things on it from time to time, your child will always have something else to discover. In the playpen you can easily create a sort of baby gym yourself by stretching a length of buttonhole elastic above the baby and hanging a number of noise-making objects from it. An advantage of this is that it can be hung both next to and above the baby.
In the second half of the first year, motor development is generally at the forefront of the baby's growth. For a blind baby, starting to move can be a little daunting. He will definitely need the help of his parents for this. Having attractive toys in his immediate surroundings may help him to get moving and to go exploring. (See Chapter 7 'Movement'.) Between nine months and the first year, a child can determine the source of a nearby sound. The development of this ability can also be stimulated by playing together. Does he reach towards your face if you make sounds close by him? Does he try to find the rattle that you shake next to and behind him?

8.1.1 Playing in the playpen

Young children are often in the playpen. To entice your baby to play and to move around, it's important to pay attention to how the playpen is set up. What do you have hanging from the sides, what kind of playpen mat is lying in the bottom, and is there something hanging above your child that he can reach for or hit? A baby who can't see will like being able to encounter toys quickly. It's will also be important for your baby that most of the toys have a fixed position. For example, the rattle with bells can always be found in the same corner. Placing a rolled up towel between the playpen bars will prevent toys falling through the bars onto the ground.

A playpen mat with all kinds of interesting things on it will allow your baby to actively explore his surroundings. This might include things like fabrics with different textures. There are playpen mats on the market with different toys attached. It can also be fun for your baby to feel the hard bottom of the play pen occasionally. You can facilitate this by folding the mat, so that there is mat on one side and the exposed playpen floor on the other. The hard surface intensifies the noises your baby makes. On a mat, most of the actions and sounds your baby makes are muffled. Blind children enjoy playing with sound.

For the experience of movement and his general development, it's important for your baby that he doesn't only play on his back, but also on his stomach and his side, and later of course, sitting up. Vary his position and the place that you lay him in the playpen.

8.1.2 Playing outside of the playpen

There are numerous places where you can play with your young child. On the ground, on a rug, on the big bed, in the grass, in the water and sitting on your lap. You can play the lap games and contact games that are described in Chapter 3. Movement games are outlined in Chapter 7. Your blind child will enjoy playing within a defined space. This could be a rug, a corner of the room, an empty baby bath, or inside a play ring. He will be able to orient himself better and find his toys more easily. You can also provide a defined space by sitting behind your child on the ground. He only needs to focus on what happens in front of him, as you are 'protecting' him from the back.

8.1.3 Little room

The so-called 'little room' is something specially intended for young blind children. This is a little house of around one square metre, that's open on one side. Because it's small and closed at the top, it encourages your child to actively explore the space. In a small space, it's easy to explore what's there, and toys are easy to find again because they're always within an arm's reach (see photo on page 48). You can attach all kinds of things to the top for your child to play with. This has the same effect as the baby gym, namely that the toys can always be found in the same place.

An enclosed space, such as the little room, keeps out a lot of ambient noise. 69 This makes it easier for your child to hear the sounds that are made inside because they sound louder. This may help stimulate your child to make sounds himself. You can make your own little room, or borrow one from an institution that provides guidance for visually impaired people. There is a list of addresses in the back of this book.

8.2 Play in blind toddlers

Your baby is getting bigger, and the opportunities to play are increasing rapidly. In general, sometime during his first year he will be able to sit up. He will be able to explore his surroundings in a different manner from this position and his play will expand accordingly. However, many blind children still prefer to play in the lying down position. While lying down, your child will be able to keep his balance better. This means that he can concentrate better on what he has in his hands while playing. If it's still difficult for your child to sit independently, you can take him on your lap instead. While he's on your lap, you can easily help him by guiding his arms from behind.

Bear in mind that your toddler will still put a lot of things into his mouth. Be careful what you give him and keep an eye on him. Your child enjoys putting things in his mouth as his mouth area is very sensitive and it's a good way for him to get a lot of information about what he has in his hands. It can also be soothing if he has teeth coming through.

Ideas to try:

- Give your child an old shoebox or a container with a few items in it. This could include a handkerchief, a scouring sponge, a facecloth, an old CD and perhaps some other items that all feel different to the touch. Vary the items, but don't put too many in the container at the same time. Give your child enough time to thoroughly explore these items. This could be while you're sitting behind your child, but also when you have your child on your lap while sitting at the table.
- Give your child an old magazine or a brochure to explore. What does it sound like, what does it feel like? Stay close by, however, as your child may put it in his mouth.
- Make a necklace of large beads and buttons of different shapes and materials, perhaps with a bell among them. Your child can thoroughly explore this. You can put the necklace in his hands, put it on him or fasten it to his playpen. For safety reasons, you should always supervise your child when he is playing with this type of item.
- Let your child play with containers and cups, something which is always fun. They can be stacked on or in each other. At first your child will need time to discover what the object is. How big is it, what shape is it, what does it feel like, what does it smell like, how does it taste, how does it sound if you drop it or throw it?
- Have your child use a tray when playing at the table. The things he's playing with will be easier for him to find and they won't roll off the table so readily.
- Let your child play in a large box, a small tent or a large crate. Many children enjoy this.
- Play a simple game with your child, such as rolling a ball. Sit opposite each other, with another adult sitting behind your child. Put your feet against each other, and then roll a ball that makes a noise back and forth. A ball with a sound is easy to make by putting rice or something similar in a beach ball, or by attaching a bell to it. Another idea is to put the ball inside a crackling plastic bag. The ball can be easily heard this way. There are also special jingle balls on the market (available from World Wide Vision www.worldwidevision.nl).

8.2.1 Object permanence

During this period, your child will begin to realise that things and people continue to exist even if he no longer feels or hears them. This is called object permanence. Once your child has discovered this, he can actively go in search of what's around him. This realisation is much more difficult for blind children than for their sighted peers. It takes a long time for blind children to completely develop this realisation, and it's important to pay attention to this during play.

Ideas to try:

- Fasten objects in a fixed position in the playpen or play corner, so that your child learns that he can always find the same item in the same place.
- Search together for the rattle your child has just thrown away. Let him discover where the rattle is for himself.
- Search together for the other parent who is in the same area, but who can't be heard at the moment.
- Sit on the ground behind your child and give him a bunch of keys (two or three are enough). If they fall on the ground, 'guide' his arms in the direction of the bunch of keys so he can find them again. Repeat this game in front of him and to his sides. Also try to guide his left arm to the right side and vice versa.
- Search together for an object that has rolled away. This will teach your child that things don't just come to him, but that he has to find them himself. For example, you could shuffle somewhere together on your bottoms, or if the object is lying within an arm's reach, you could guide your child's arm towards it.
- Fasten a rattle with a suction cap to the tray of the high chair or to the table; this will give your child a lot of enjoyment. These rattles are available from ordinary toy shops.

8.3 Surroundings

An inviting environment encourages enjoyable play. For a blind baby, this means an environment in which it's not too difficult for him to find his toys. A clear area in which items and play areas have fixed places is pleasant for him, as well as toys that smell fresh and are easy to handle. During this period you can get into the habit of tidying up the toys into a fixed place in a cupboard. Your child will eventually be able to find his things in the cupboard by himself. For example, you could have separate containers for blocks, balls, and so on.
Your child's surroundings should also be safe. Make sure that he can't hurt himself. If he can't sit upright by himself, you can lay a couple of cushions around him or a non-slippery, folded up sleeping bag.

8.4 Playing together

Parents like to see their children playing with other children. Be aware that actual playing together only begins around kindergarten age. Until then, children still mostly play alongside each other. Playing side by side with other children is unpredictable for your blind child. After all, he can't see what the other child is doing or where he is. He can be touched unexpectedly and toys can be taken away from him. However, it is good for the development of your child that he gets used to the proximity and behaviour of other children.
Sometimes your blind child will have an extra need to be close to you and to feel secure when there are others around. You may need to keep a close eye on what happens when there are other children around, in order to avoid unpleasant experiences. This requires clear explanation on both sides. For example: 'Thijs can't see you, but he would just like to feel your hands. Is that all right?' And: 'Bas likes your ball so much that he's just taken it away for a moment, can you hear? You'll get it back in a second.'

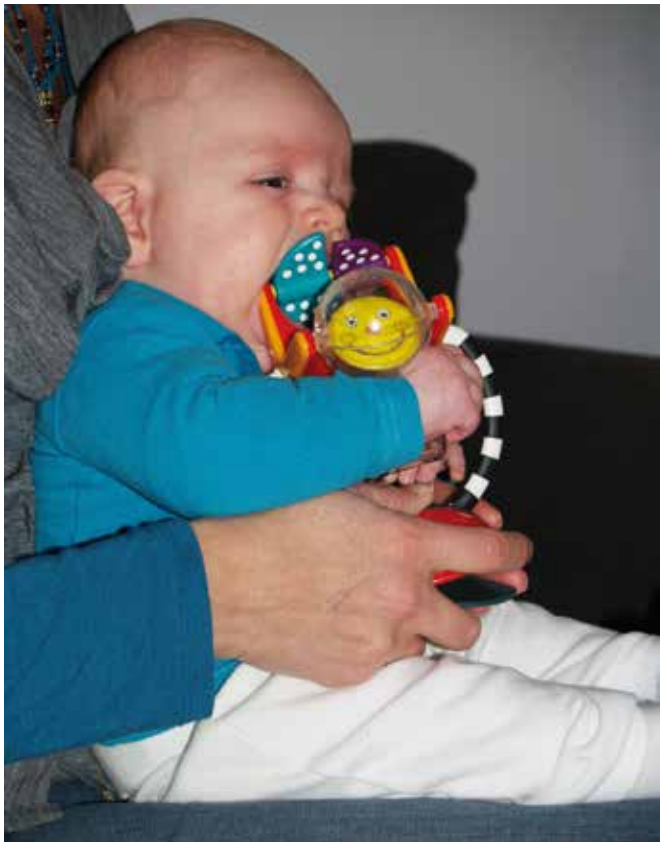
8.4.1 Playing with adults

It's a lot of fun to play with your son or daughter. There are all kinds of fun games to play with your child on your lap. Give him plenty of time to explore you: where is your face, where are your back and your hair, where are your legs, what do your clothes feel like? Although it's good to fully describe what he's touching, it's also important to sometimes stay silent for a moment. This enables your child to concentrate on his touch and on the sounds he hears.
Your child will certainly enjoy sitting on your lap and singing songs, and making movements along with the songs. This could include songs like 'Ricketty ricketty rocking horse' and 'Ride a little pony'. Games in which you imitate each other will be suitable once your child is a little older. You can clap your hands once, and then encourage him to do the same. Does he also copy you if you strike the table or a drum? Although it may be difficult for your toddler at first, you can encourage him to give you something. Handing the ball back and forth can become a fun game. This game is easier if there is another adult present to whom you and your child can give the ball or another object together. You can then guide your child's hands.

8.5 Toys

For blind children, playing with all kinds of objects from daily life is often much more interesting than playing with toys from a toyshop. Toddlers can have a lot of fun with an empty bottle. In addition, a spoon, a whisk, empty freezer containers, an old magazine, old CDs, a basket containing clothes pegs, branches and stones from outside and nearly empty packages such as a jar of cream or a box of sprinkles are so fun that they will keep your toddler amused for a long time. Most

toyshops sell a lot of plastic items. It's important for your blind baby that he encounters more materials than just plastic.
Fabric, wood and metal all feel and sound different. Hard and soft, rough and smooth materials, cold and warm to the touch – your child needs to get to know all of them. You may also notice that your child has a particular need to play with the objects in his immediate surroundings. Because he can't see them all at a glance, he needs to discover everything in a different way. He does this by holding objects in his hands, moving them, dropping them, hitting things with them and putting them in or against his mouth. It's common for blind children to prefer holding and exploring hard materials rather than soft ones. They may be startled for a second if given a soft object and will throw it away immediately. Soft objects can change shape and this can make them scary. Hard materials with a fixed shape invite the child to explore them fully by touch.
If your child has difficulty with soft materials, help him to become accustomed to them slowly. Preferably start with a soft item that doesn't change shape easily, such as a sturdy soft toy. Then progress to items that do change shape, such as a washcloth. As much as possible, let your child take the initiative in grasping the object. If your child doesn't want to at that moment, try again later, and repeat this a number of times if necessary.



Ideas for suitable toys:

- Sound-making toys, such as simple musical instruments. This could include a drum, a maraca or a xylophone and, once your child is a little bigger, a harmonica.
- Toddlers enjoy balls of all kinds, from small to large. An inflatable ball doesn't have to be blown up too hard. It will be easier to grasp and will roll away less readily if it's a little soft.
- Round stacking cups are also a lot of fun. Your child can enjoy turning them over, stacking them in each other and getting them out again, and knocking over the tower of cups you've just built for him.
- Duplo-Primo consists of blocks that are intended to fit together. You can also put the blocks in an empty egg carton.
- Magnetic blocks on a metal sheet. The advantage of magnetic blocks is that they don't fall so easily and are therefore easy to find again. You child will probably enjoy making sounds with them at first.
- Pots and pans from the kitchen, with a wooden spoon, whisk and similar kitchen utensils are also fun for toddlers to play with.
- A music box that your child can work himself.
- Baby beads.

8.6 Playing outside

Playing outside is a completely different experience to playing inside. There are unfamiliar noises, the temperature is different, and the surface on which your child is playing is often different to that inside. Your child will need a lot of time to

absorb all of these new experiences before he can actually start playing. When your child is still a baby, get him used to being outside in the garden. Lying or sitting in the pram will give him ample opportunity to become accustomed to this new environment. Exploring his surroundings outside is more difficult. The space is larger and less orderly. To help your child orient himself, you can hang up a wind chime at the door.

For young children, it's nice to have a fixed, defined place to play outside. For example, this could be a play mat, an inflatable pool without water in it, or a sandpit, preferably without sand at first. It's better to put your child in a corner of the garden than in the middle of the grass. Once your child can walk, you can help him to explore the garden. Starting out these explorations from the same point each time will give him a sense of security. Where is the garden furniture, where is the sandpit? Don't forget about steps up and down. It will help your toddler if he can use a ride-on car, a doll's pram or something similar. He will feel less vulnerable and will not so easily bump into or fall over something. Perhaps you could go and feel the outside of the house together. What do the stones feel like, where is the window? What do the balcony railings feel like? The tree in the garden is also worth exploring.

Once your child is no longer putting everything in his mouth, it's fun to play outside with natural objects from the garden, such as branches, leaves, sand and stones. These can be put in a container afterwards to be touched again later. It's also worth taking your child outside in bad weather to give him the experience of a hard wind, the rain and the snow. Put boots on your toddler and let him walk through puddles. This helps him learn about things that he hears others talking about.

8.6.1 In the sandpit

Most children really enjoy a sandpit. However, this can't be taken for granted with a blind child. He may find sand unpleasant to the touch and will cry if he's put in the sandpit. This can be prevented by bearing the following in mind:

- Don't just put your blind child in the sandpit. First give him a washing up bowl with sand in it to play with.
- Don't force him to touch the sand, but guide him by first doing so yourself and telling him what's in the container. Give your child plenty of time to explore the sand. If he doesn't want to do so at the moment, respect his wishes and offer him the opportunity again later.
- Let your child play next to the sandpit at first, so that he can touch the sand with just his hands or feet.
- Offer water with the sand if your child prefers to play with wet sand. Give him a little watering can or a container of water.

- Put your child in a corner of the sandpit, as playing from a corner is often the most pleasant. It will give him a sense of security to explore the sandpit from a fixed position.
- If your child doesn't want to play with sand at all, you can offer him dry rice or macaroni instead. This has a more solid form than sand.

8.6.2 Playing with water

It's fun to play with water. For a toddler, a washing up bowl of water is enough to splash, pour and feel the water. Sitting in a bath can also be lots of fun. Take the same points into consideration as for the sandpit. It's best if the water isn't too cold. First let your child feel the temperature of the water with his hands or feet. He may be startled if the water is colder or warmer than he expected. Try as much as possible to prevent unpleasant experiences such as falling over and getting wet unexpectedly. You might like to let your child help with watering the plants.

8.6.3 Swinging

Many children really enjoy being moved back and forth. When they're young, this could be on the arm of a parent, and when they're a little older, on a rocking horse and later on a swing. It's a good idea to make all kinds of movements with your blind child and to incorporate variation in this. If you notice that he moves back and forth a lot, then encourage him to also move from side to side. Don't put him on a rocking horse for too long, in order to prevent so-called 'blindism' (see Chapter 1). If your child finds it scary to sit on a swing, it may be because he has lost the security of being in touch with the ground. It will give your child a safer and more pleasant feeling if he has a sturdy seat and can reach the ground himself with his feet. Consider sitting on a swing yourself with your child on your lap. When doing so, don't only move back and forth, but vary your movements by rotating or swinging from side to side.

9 On their own two feet

Two-year-old Iris is looking for her stuffed toy, which is on a chair. Her mother is standing in the doorway of the living room and says: ‘It’s there, Iris,’ after which Iris goes to her mother.

Sighted children learn many skills by watching and imitating. If one-year-old Boris sees his mother roll a ball towards him, he wants to copy her. At first, this will be a little uncontrolled. Through practice and encouragement from his mother, Boris will eventually learn to roll the ball towards his mother.
Blind children lack the opportunity to imitate in this way. They are therefore not easily challenged to try new things independently. By doing a lot together with your blind baby, telling him what's happening and letting him feel what you're doing, he will discover the world around him.

9.1 Learning new actions

Learning new skills, such as drinking from a cup, taking off socks and going down a slide, takes a lot more time for a blind baby and toddler than for his sighted peers. There are some rules of thumb that you can use to teach your child something new.

1. Use all of the senses
Although your blind baby lacks his vision, this can be compensated to a large extent by his other senses. He can obtain a lot of information by using hearing, touch and smell. Let him smell the baby lotion, touch his nappy and listen to the bath water running.

2. Use verbal support
Tell your child what's happening or what's about to happen. Preferably use short sentences, always formulated in the same way. Use concepts such as 'under and over', 'in and out', 'up and down' and 'to and from'. Don't use words like 'here and there'. This is far too abstract for a blind child and tells him nothing. Instead, say: 'Your stuffed toy is in the corner of the couch.'

3. Allow him to feel the whole action
By feeling the whole action, the baby receives insight into the process of the skill to be learned. Cleaning your teeth is not only about the movement of the brush in your mouth, but also putting toothpaste on the toothbrush and cleaning the toothbrush afterwards. It's not about whether your baby can already do it independently, but whether he understands what his parents are doing. Try cleaning your teeth with your child next to you, and let him feel what you're doing.
You can help your child to experience an action by putting your own hands over your child's hands, and then directing his actions. You carry out the movement together. Announce that you're going to put your hands over your child's hands. Some children are very sensitive to unexpected touches on their 80 hands. For an older baby, it's pleasant if you take him on your lap for this, or sit behind him.

Once the child is able to control his movements better, you can direct his actions by his wrists and then later by his elbows.

4. Time and repetition
A child needs time and repetition in order to master a skill; time to thoroughly investigate the objects to be used with the hands, feet and mouth, and repetition to ultimately master the action independently. Encouragement and compliments help him to do it again and to keep practising. Touching, hugging, cheering and clapping your hands are kinds of encouragement your child can perceive. An admiring glance, smile or a thumbs up are not useful to a blind baby because he can't see them.

9.2 Acting independently

A baby quickly grows into a toddler, who with a little help can do quite a lot for himself. This doesn't mean groundbreaking skills like hanging up his jacket himself or watering the plants, but small everyday skills that are appropriate to his age. He can be taught to take off his own shoes or wipe his face with a bib at this age. This will help your child to grow in independence and be able to stand on his own two feet later.

Which actions can you already do together with your child at a young age? There are a number of ideas below.

9.2.1 Taking off socks

You can encourage your baby to explore his feet by touching them, fastening straps with bells attached around his ankles, or putting an aluminium foil rescue blanket under his feet.
Once your baby has discovered his feet, you can encourage him to take his socks off by carrying out the action together. The baby can sit on your lap for this, or lie in the playpen or on the change table.

9.2.2 Eating and drinking

Learning to drink independently and searching for the bottle are skills that can be learned quickly. Chapter 5 describes in detail how to approach this, as well as the follow-up.

9.2.3 Waving

Waving goodbye to daddy, mummy, brother, sister, or granny and grandpa is something children can do from an early age. However, a blind baby has can't see and therefore has no example of this. Practising this movement together teaches him the context of this action. Waving goodbye only becomes interesting to him if there is an action or gesture from the other person that he can hear or feel. This might be a kiss, a song or an enthusiastic 'Byeee!' Waving goodbye only really becomes meaningful when the person who is departing actually leaves, and doesn't stay to chat for a little longer.

9.2.4 Undressing

Undressing is easier than getting dressed. In most cases, a blind child will only learn to get dressed at the age of around three years.
You can generally start teaching your toddler to get undressed at an age of around two years. By sitting or standing behind your child, you can help him by following the rules of thumb described above. Simple actions such as taking off socks, hat and gloves are the easiest for him to learn. Taking off loose clothing after you have undone the buttons and zips for him can then follow. Pay some attention to the different parts of clothing. How do zips and buttons feel, where are pockets located, how does a dress feel different from trousers.

9.2.5 Washing and drying hands

Most young children love playing with their hands under water running from a tap. Once your child is a little older, you can encourage him to touch the whole tap and the basin. Hey, where is the water going, can you hear the sound the water makes?
Encourage him to explore the different basins in the house. He will find out that the sink and the tap in the kitchen feel different to the basin and the tap in the

bathroom. Letting him turn the tap on himself is often also fun, but be careful with the hot tap. Furthermore, your child may get a fright if a strong jet of water suddenly comes out of the tap.
When washing hands, use soap and dry his hands afterwards. At first, direct the movements that your child needs to make, and then gradually let him do more and more by himself. Your child will enjoy soap that has a pleasant fragrance. Some children strongly dislike liquid soap from a pump dispenser, because this substance changes shape. It's a good idea to keep the towel and soap in a fixed place. Once your toddler can walk, the sound of a running tap is also a good orientation point for him to walk towards.

9.2.6 Hair brushing

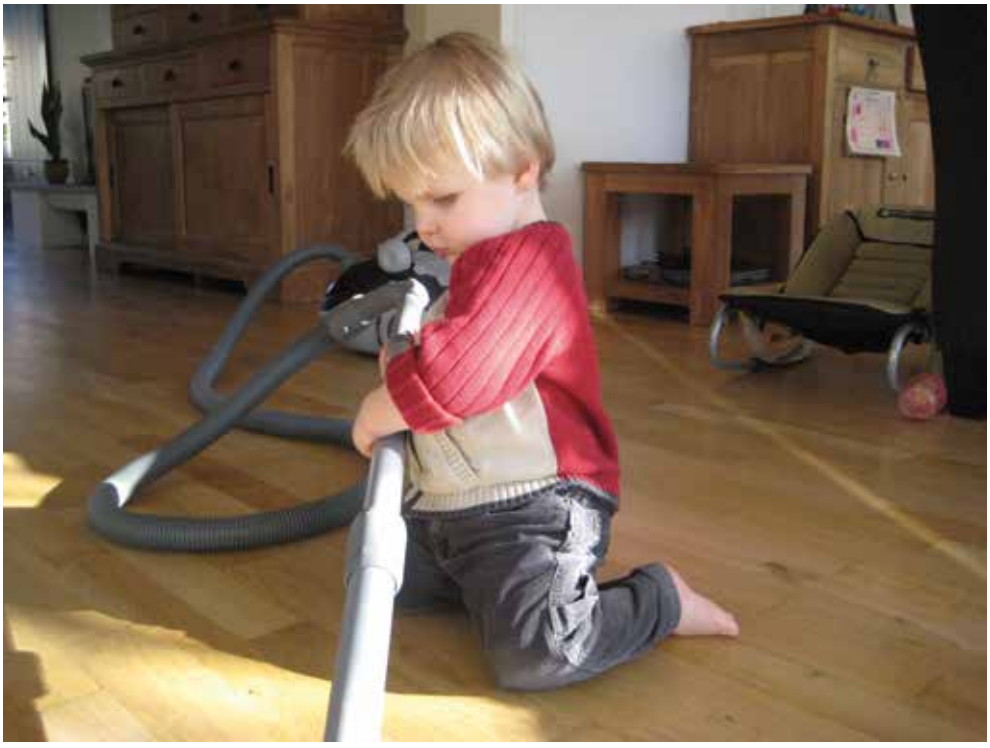
Beforehand, encourage your child to thoroughly explore the comb and brush that he's going to use to brush his hair. You can start by teaching him how to brush a doll's hair. Later on, he can try to brush his own hair or yours.

9.2.7 Telephone

The telephone can be very attractive to small children. They can hear a buzzing tone issuing from it, and sometimes a voice too. Let your child explore the telephone. You could also let him hold the telephone while you call someone familiar together, such as granny or grandpa.

9.2.8 Helping out

Your toddler can easily carry out a number of small household tasks if you do this together. Many small children really enjoy helping their parents. Tasks could include putting peeled potatoes in the pot, snapping beans together or putting washing in the washing machine. You can teach your child to pass you something. 'Give your cup to me.'



10 Sleep

The parents of eight-month-old Koen are exhausted. Koen keeps falling asleep in the playpen at the end of the afternoon. He's impossible to wake up. Then, at night time, he's wide awake and turns the whole household upside down.

Babies spend most of the day sleeping. At first, they need to be fed regularly at night, and will be awake briefly for that. As they grow older, they spend more time awake during the day and sleep more at night. This is no different for your blind baby. He also needs a great deal of sleep at first and will spend more time awake later. However, a child who can't see anything at all can't distinguish between light and dark. He may therefore become confused and have difficulty building up a good day and night rhythm. This is frustrating for both the child and the parents.

What can a parent do?

- Keep your child calm when feeding him at night, and do only what is absolutely necessary. Don't make any extra sounds or take unnecessary actions. You need to make it clear to your baby that night time is a quiet time.
- Make sure that your child is relaxed before taking him to bed. Try to avoid a lot of activity before bedtime. Save playing around for another time of day.
- Only do active things during the day, such as playing, walking outside, drinking. Of course, he will also sleep during the day. If you notice that your child is sleeping more during the day than at night, involve him more in your own activities. Try to keep him awake longer during the day by playing with him or taking him outside. Determine whether your child feels bored during the day and is falling asleep because of it.
- Establish a regular daily routine. Eat, drink and sleep at set times.
- Lay your baby down to sleep in the same place, either in his pram or cot. It should preferably be a different place to the one where he plays. If you notice that he has fallen asleep elsewhere, then put him in his bed or the pram.
- Use fixed rituals before bedtime. These make the transition from one event to another clear, so that the child can predict what's going to happen and what's expected of him. Fixed rituals might include a set order in the actions that you carry out, playing a tune from a music box, singing a lullaby, saying a prayer or reciting a poem, closing the curtains together, and saying what you're doing.
- Give your child his own familiar stuffed toy with recognisable scent.

Larger children become more active, crawling, standing and then walking. This can take longer for blind children. For various reasons that are covered in other chapters, it's more difficult for them to be physically active. They may therefore be less tired and need less sleep. If so, think about all of the things that your child does during a day that might tire him. Consider doing extra activities and limiting sleep during the day. You can also choose to put your child to bed a little later at night.
If you notice that your child appears to become anxious at bedtime, try to find out what he's afraid of. Is he scared because he can't hear you? Is he afraid because he can hear noises and doesn't know what they mean?

It's important to stay calm and listen to the sounds that he can hear together. Tell him what these sounds are and where they come from. For example, is it the television in the living room, or a clattering moped passing by in the street outside? How far away is the sound, and how close might it come? Young blind children often can't determine what it is that they are hearing. How big is the mosquito he can hear, and what's happening with a heater that's making noises? In summer, when the weather's warm, the window may be slightly open. This means that noises from outside will sound very different and will be a lot easier to hear. Your child may lie there listening instead of sleeping, or may become afraid of the noises. If you want your child to go to sleep, you can give him a brief explanation at that moment, and then talk about it further the next day. Don't make the sleep ritual too long, stay clear about what you're doing, and stick to the familiar order in the things you're doing.

10.1 Transition from cradle to cot

At some point, your baby will grow out of his cradle and it'll be time for him to go into a bigger bed. He may feel alone and lost in a larger bed. A larger bed is less defined. Your baby may prefer a small bed due to the enclosed feeling it gives him. You can give him this feeling by only making up his cot at the bottom end, so that he can feel the end of his bed with his feet. Don't forget to include his own stuffed toy and music box. When he moves to his new bed, he will be comforted by that trusted scent and familiar sound. Consider using a blanket instead of a duvet. A blanket feels heavier, which enables your child to feel his body better.

10.2 Persistent sleep problems

Finally, should there be a persistent disturbance in his day and night rhythm, it's wise to discuss this with a support organisation and perhaps with your GP or the staff at the child healthcare clinic.

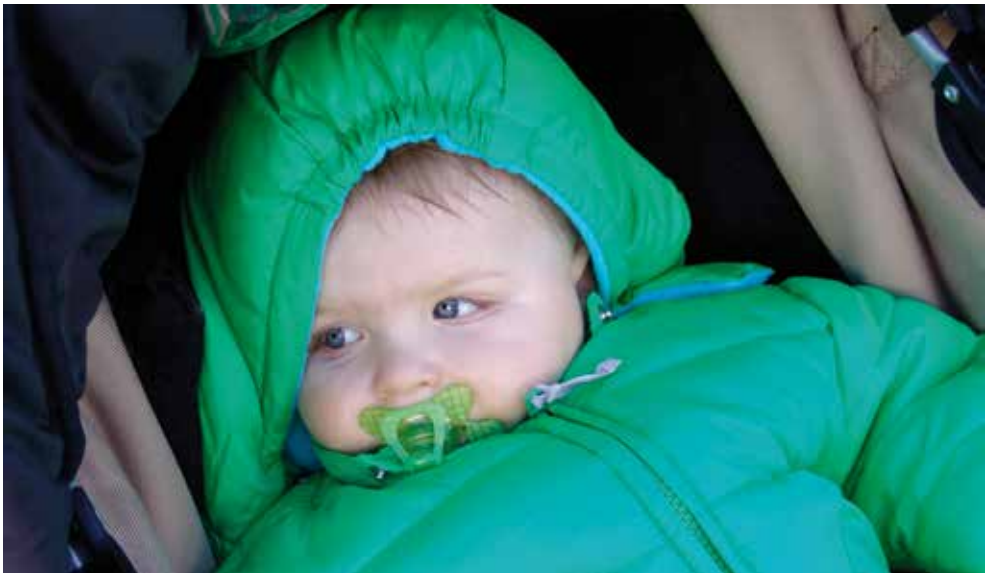
11 Out and about

Floor loves going for walks in the pram. Today Floor's mother is putting a hat on her because it's cold outside. While they are out on their walk, Floor is constantly crying and stays unsettled.

For a baby, it's not only important to get to know his own environment, but gradually also the wider world around him. This gives him new experiences with other sounds, smells, voices and touch impressions. The older your baby gets, the more interested he will become in the things that are going on around him. Therefore, it's a good idea to take him outside with you regularly. Take him out for walks to places where he can experience something new. The bakery smells of delicious bread, in the forest you can hear the rustling of leaves, and at the pond you can hear the quacking of the ducks. Below are some ideas for things that you can do with your baby which, with a little help, he will enjoy. If you go out, choose a time that's not too busy. Take unexpected events into account, as well as how your child might react.

11.1 Going outside

Babies generally enjoy going outside. At first, this will be in the pram or pushchair, and later your child will be able to walk by himself or sit in a seat on the front of your bike. Blind babies can sometimes react fearfully to going outdoors because there are unfamiliar and unexpected sounds outside. It's also quite an experience to feel the effects of the weather. What does the warmth of the sun feel like, the blowing of the wind and the cold air on your cheeks? It's most pleasant for your child if you keep talking to him, touch him from time to time, or sing a song while you are on your way. This will tell him that you're close by. You could also carry your baby in a baby carrier. This gives you more body contact, which helps your baby feel safer. Your baby may prefer not to wear a hat or hood, because they make it difficult for him to hear the outdoor sounds or the sound of your voice. In most pushchairs, your child will be sitting facing away from you. See whether he prefers to sit facing you. You will be able to see his reactions better, and he will be able to hear you more easily. Once your child is a little older, tell him what the noises are that you hear on the way, such as the sound of a car, church bells or the sound of gravel underfoot while you're walking along a path. Once your child can sit unassisted, you can encourage him to experience different kinds of ground surfaces such as sand and grass. Build up to this slowly, because blind children often find it a little scary to touch new kinds of surfaces. A possible solution is for you to sit with him on your lap, or together on a picnic blanket. This provides him with a base from which he can explore the grass or sand at his own pace, with his hands or feet. You can gradually encourage him to crawl around on this new surface.



11.2 Doing the shopping

Take your child along with you to different shops. The bakery smells different to the fish shop or the greengrocer's. Choose a moment when it's quiet so that he isn't overwhelmed by a lot of different noises. Tell him where you are and what you're going to buy. If your baby is able to hold things, give him the item you're going to buy. For an older child, going shopping in the supermarket can be a lot of fun. He can sit up in the shopping trolley and you can give him all kinds of products to hold and tell him what they are.

11.3 Visiting friends and family

It's no problem to take your child to visit others. Every child responds differently to a different environment and the number of people there. When your baby is very young, your proximity will be enough for him to 91 feel at ease. You can facilitate this by taking your baby onto your lap, or carrying him with you in a baby carrier. If you want to have your baby sleep in a different environment, then you can give him a feeling of security by putting him in his own pram with his dummy or his soft toy. An older baby will be more aware of the fact that he is in a new environment. Walk around the living room with your baby in your arms. Tell him what you encounter and what sounds there are. Take his own play mat along with some favourite toys, so that there's something familiar around him. It's nice if there's time during the visit for you to do things with your child. Don't be too quick to put him on someone else's lap. This may give him a fright. During the visit, keep an eye on how much your child can deal with. If it gets too much for him, take him home and try again another time.

11.4 Playground

A playground only becomes interesting to a blind child once he can climb and scramble and can sit well independently. By regularly visiting a small playground, he can gain experience in sliding down the slide and swinging. He may find this scary at first because it disrupts his sense of balance. Doing these things together and doing them regularly will ensure that he masters these skills. Your child can gain a lot of movement experience in a playground. It also offers a variety of discovery experiences; you can encourage your child to thoroughly explore the playground equipment with his hands.

11.5 The forest

There is a lot to discover in a forest. What does a forest smell like, where do the leaves and branches come from? Can you hear the rustling of leaves in the trees as the wind blows, and can you feel how soft the moss is? Listen to the birds together. Tell your child what the forest looks like. If your child is old enough to walk, let him experience the ground. Is it a paved path or soft ground strewn with leaves? If your child is around two years old, then it's a nice idea to fill a bowl with things from the forest, so you can touch the items and discuss them ahead of your visit.

11.6 Petting zoo

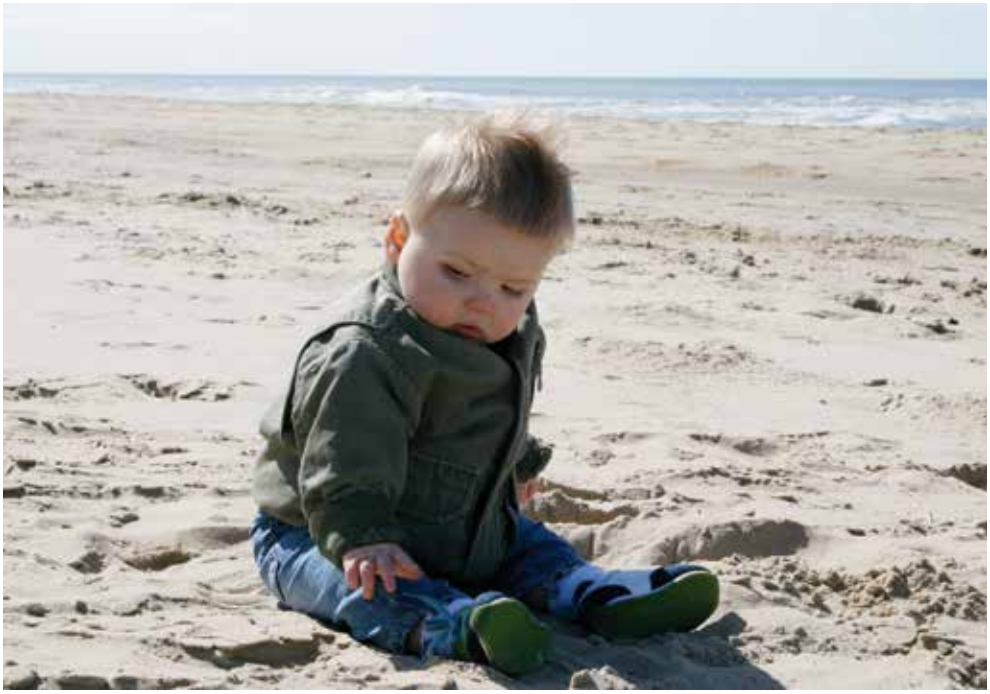
Going to a petting zoo is often a fun outing for a toddler. Tell your child in advance which animal he's about to stroke and what it will feel like. Hold the animal yourself or have one of the farm's animal handlers do so. There is much more to experience at a children's farm than simply stroking the animals. What kinds of noises do the animals make, what do they smell like and what does straw feel like?

11.7 Swimming

Playing and moving in the water is an activity that an older baby may really enjoy. When you go to a swimming pool for the first time with your child, the smells, the acoustics, the warmth and the sounds may be overwhelming for him. Choose a moment that isn't too busy. Give your child time to get used to everything, and describe 93 everything that he can hear, smell and feel. Many blind children enjoy being held while in the water. Tell him what you're going to do. 'Come, let's go into the water together. Can you feel how cold it is?' Your child will find it most pleasant to feel the temperature of the water first with his hands and feet. By observing his facial expression and body language, you will be able to tell whether your child likes being in the swimming pool. Play a lot together in the paddling pool. Show your child that you love being in the water yourself. Let him decide for himself how far into the water he goes. Try to prevent unpleasant experiences such as falling over and being splashed by others as much as possible. The acoustics at the swimming pool and water in his ears may make it harder for your child to hear what you say.

11.8 The beach

A day out at the beach is a popular excursion. What does the sea smell like, what do the seagulls sound like, what can you feel on the beach? There is so much to experience. Be aware that your child may have difficulty with the sand and the limitlessness of the surroundings. You can solve this by letting him sit in his pushchair or by sitting him on a blanket. You can then slowly help him become accustomed to the sand from the rug. You can also use a beach tent.



12 Parties

It's Anne's first birthday. People come to visit, there is cake to eat, and Anne is getting presents. Everything is a little different that day. It isn't long before Anne only wants to sit on her own familiar chair and she touches it repeatedly. Her brothers are fully enjoying the party.

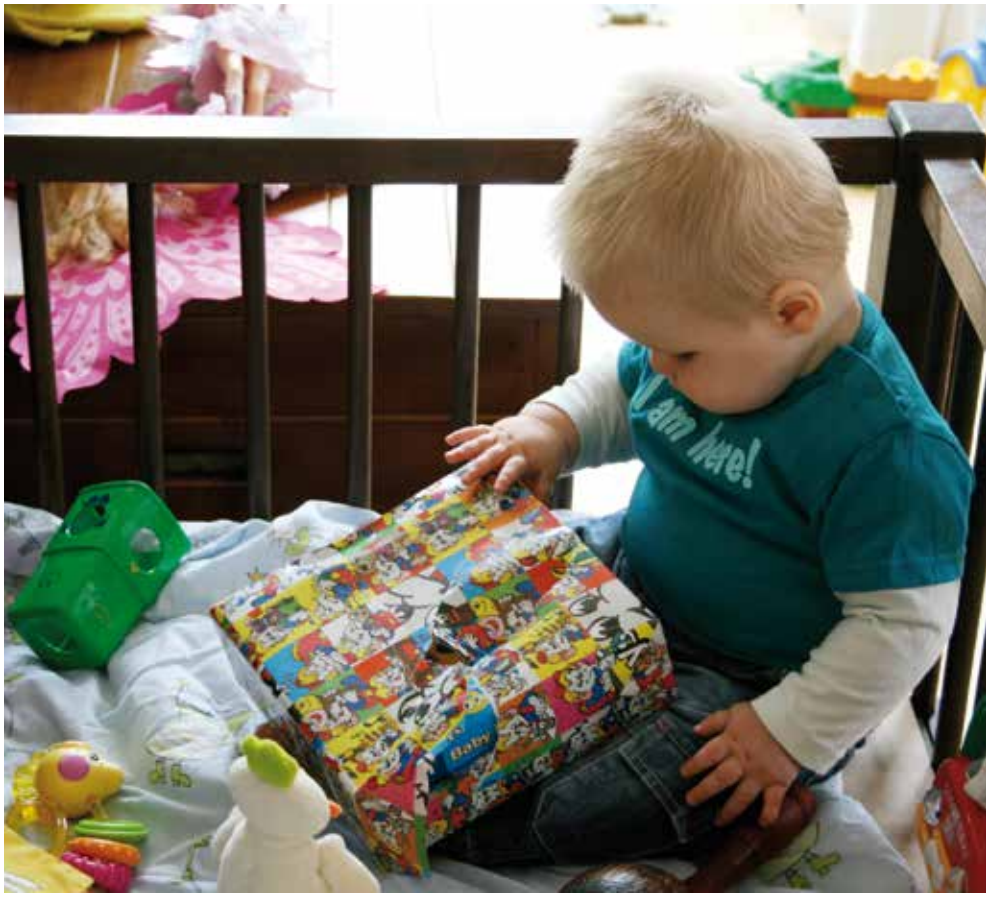
From birthdays to Christmas, there are lots of parties to celebrate with your young child. Parties are first and foremost about fun, both for the child celebrating his birthday and those who are invited. Blind children can have just as much fun at a party as their sighted peers. However, some extra adaptations may be necessary.

12.1 Birthday parties

Your child's first birthday is usually a very special occasion. Your child is already one year old! And it's a year in which a great deal has probably happened. You can make a special day of your child's birthday. The things you should bear in mind are listed below. • It will be pleasant for your child if the day has some fixed points such as eating, drinking and sleeping at the usual times. The fact that everything is different on such a day can cause your child to become upset, after which it won't be fun for him any more.

- Even though your child can't see it, it's nice to decorate the room in a festive manner. Let your child touch a streamer and an inflated balloon. Make sure he doesn't put a balloon or streamer in his mouth. Touching the balloon with his lips while you're close by may be fine. Hang the streamers and balloons low enough that your child can reach them. You can put some rice in the balloons or attach a bell to them.
- Birthday parties often also mean party hats. Not every blind child enjoys having something on his head, so be careful with a party hat. A possible alternative is a necklace with a variety of objects attached that are interesting to touch.
- If you've invited others to the party, it's important to welcome the visitors together and to tell your child who is coming in. This will help your child to better understand where all the voices and sounds are coming from. It's generally not pleasant for your child to be unexpectedly touched or picked up by lots of people, and it's a good idea to warn your visitors of this beforehand.
- Your child will probably not really understand a wrapped gift. Playing with the crackling wrapping paper will sometimes be just as fun as the contents of the gift. It's okay if your child initially has little interest in new toys. He will need all of his attention for everything else going on during the day.
- Naturally, there is likely to be a cake at the party. Encourage your child to smell the cake and let him touch a little piece, and perhaps eat it with his fingers. Tell your child what the cake looks like. Tell him about the cream and let him smell, touch and taste it. You can do the same with the other ingredients in the cake.

His second birthday will generally proceed much the same as the first, except that you will now be able to prepare your toddler by reading him a story about having a birthday. 'Miffy's Birthday' by Dick Bruna is a nice book for this.



12.2 Christmas

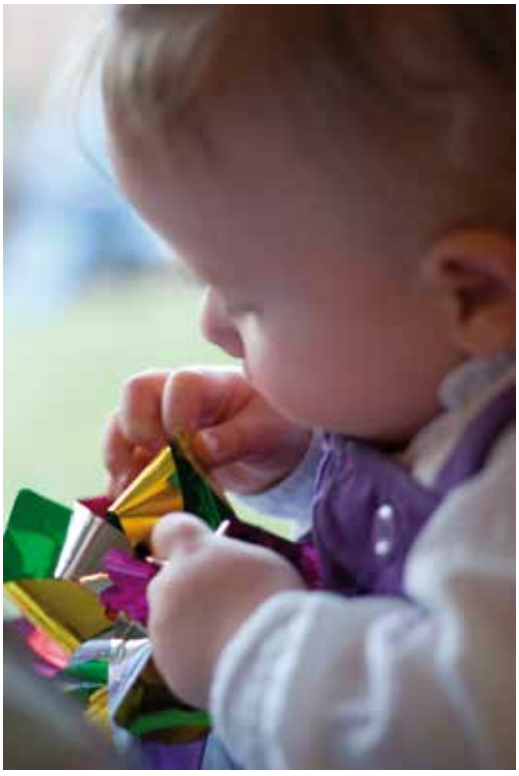
Christmas is a celebration in which the creation of a warm and festive atmosphere plays a central role. Lights, candles and a tree are all elements that belong to this day. Lighting is not important to blind children. However, children with some vision can really enjoy Christmas lights, because they can still perceive them a little. Be aware that ambient lighting is not necessarily fun. Children who can still see a little won't be able to at all if the lights go out or are dimmed. By observing your child's body language, you can determine whether ambient lighting is annoying for him. In general, you can celebrate Christmas as usual.
Christmas tree Having a Christmas tree in the house is quite an experience. Tell your child about it beforehand so that he does not come across it unexpectedly. Let him smell the tree and feel where it is positioned. If your child is a little older, you can perhaps let him touch and feel a couple of decorations. This is what a ball feels like, quite different from a streamer, hey? It's advisable to use unbreakable ornaments for decorating the tree. This will make it easier for you to allow your child to handle them. You can decorate your tree with all kinds of objects that feel

different to the touch. For example, you could use Christmas bells that make a sound, birds, angels and pine cones. Involve your child in decorating the tree, and take plenty of time to do so.

Candles
Candles offer more than just the light that they give. Encourage your toddler to carefully feel the warmth they emit, and consider using scented candles. Be extra careful, because blind children can't see where the candles are. Let your child handle and smell different kinds of unlit candles.

12.3 Presents

There are often presents at parties, both for your child and for others. What do wrapping paper and sticky tape feel like? And what happens when you cut the paper? Prepare your child for the fact that sticky tape can stick to your fingers. This can be a very unpleasant sensation for some children. Together with your child, wrap one of your child's things and then unwrap it again. This will help him to better understand the concept of wrapping. But what can you give your child? Every child has different preferences for presents, of course. The following are some suggestions categorised according to age and theme.



For children turning 1.

Music:
- CDs with music or children's songs
- Musical instruments such as a xylophone, drum, maracas, bells, wind chimes.

Movement:
- Block wagon.
- Jingle ball.
- Beach ball with sound 99
- A swing in which your child can sit properly.
- Rocking horse.
- Slide.

Tactile toys:
- Studded ball.
- Toy blocks with various textures.
- Touch and feel books, crinkle books.

Other:
- Stacking cups.
- Suitcase/bag.
- Ring tower.
- Rattles.
- Slinky.
- Baby beads.

For children turning 2.

Music:
- CDs with music or children's songs
- CDs with children's stories such as Miffy.
- Musical instruments such as those mentioned above, as well as a harmonica, toy keyboard/piano, tambourine.

Building and creating:
- Construction toys such as Duplo or Nopper.
- Large beads (preferably flat beads) with plastic string.
- Beads on sticks.
- Shape board.

In/out/on:

- Stacking cups.
- Blocks.
- Small play tent. 100 101
- Suitcase.
- Shape sorting box with one or two holes.

Movement

- Doll's pram.
- Jingle ball.
- Beach ball with bell.
- A swing in which your child can sit properly.
- Ride-on car.
- Walking bike.
- Crawl tunnel.

Other:

- Modelling clay.
- Tactile bags.
- Scent bags.
- Sand pit.
- Bath and sand pit toys.
- Nice-smelling soap.
- Doll with accessories.
- Toy tea set.
- Toy telephone.

13 Going to the doctor

In the first two years of his life, your child will make regular visits to the child health clinic and the doctor. These events are difficult for blind babies and toddlers to understand. Try to make these visits as predictable and safe as possible. You could try the following:

- Try to keep the time in the waiting room to a minimum.
- Stay in physical contact with your baby. Most examinations can be carried out with your baby sitting on your lap. If not, then stay in contact with your child by putting your hand on his stomach, for example.
- Talk in a calming manner to your child.
- Explain to the doctor that it's best for your child if he is touched as little as possible on his hands and head.
- Restrict the number of people who touch your baby.
- If your child needs a jab, preferably have this done somewhere other than on the fingers. Your child's fingers are important to him as a means of exploring the world, so it's important to avoid negative experiences associated with his fingers as much as possible. An alternative is use his heel instead.
- Explain briefly and simply what's going to happen.

Some treatments can be painful and unpleasant. As a parent, try to remain calm and comfort your child after it's all over.

14 Doubts

Blind babies often develop in a different way to sighted children. This can lead to questions, concerns and doubts. It's important to discuss your concerns with people around you and with experts on visually handicapped children. It's therefore a good idea to register early with a support organisation (you can find the addresses in the back of this book). They can answer your questions about the development of your child, address any concerns you might have, give advice and help you determine what steps to take. It's important for a blind baby to be guided as well as possible in his development. There is often a lot of extra effort needed for this.

A developmental delay which is detected in time will generally cause fewer additional problems later. However, waiting too long can lead to an increase in both the delay and the uncertainty.

Addresses

For questions about visual (and multiple) disabilities, you can contact:

THE NETHERLANDS

Bartiméus
Van Renesselaan 30A 3703 AJ Zeist
Telephone: +31 88 88 99 888
Website: www.bartimeus.nl
Email: info@bartimeus.nl

Koninklijke Visio
Amersfoortsestraatweg 180 1272 RR Huizen
Telephone: +31 35 698 57 11
Website: www.visio.org

BELGIUM

Koninklijk Instituut Spermalie
Snaggaardstraat 9 8000 Brugge
http://www.de-kade.org/PortaalDeKade

Centrum Ganspoel VZW
Centre for the support of children and adults with visual impairments
Ganspoel 2 3040 Huldenberg
Website: www.ganspoel.be

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