# Why does a child with CVI (or a diagnosis of severe vision loss) need their early intervention therapies accommodated for their vision loss?

Because, if therapists do not understand how vision loss affects your child’s development, the therapy will be less effective.

## Consider this:

* A sighted child learns as much as 90% of everything she learns through her visual pathways
* As much as 85% of what a child will learn in her lifetime is learned within the first five years.
* A child with severe vision loss is at-risk for delays in every area of her development.

Young children (birth to age 3) whose visual pathways do not work correctly face challenges in their ability to learn during the time when their brains are developing the most. The key problem is a lack of **INCIDENTAL LEARNING.**

## What is INCIDENTAL LEARNING?

From the time you open your eyes in the morning to the time you close your eyes at night, you are constantly taking in information about your environment without even trying. Incidental learning is the information you receive with your eyes without realizing it.

Here’s an example:

You are a sighted person. You enter a room you have never entered before. In just a few seconds - you get a tremendous amount of information.

Just by looking…. You know the size of the room. You know how high the ceiling is and whether or not you can stand up straight or need to bend down to enter. You know whether the room has windows or other doors. Glancing at the windows, you know what the weather is like outside. You know whether or not there are tables and chairs in the room. You know if there are rugs, tacks, or ants on the floor. You know immediately if something or someone is blocking your path. You know if there are people in the room. You know if there is an escaped tiger lurking in the corner, a gaping hole in the floor, bats hanging above you, or a slowly growing acid puddle two feet away. In a glance, you know if you need to leave. You know where the exits are. You can see if snacks are available. And, most importantly, if they are good snacks.

It took more time to read this paragraph about entering a room than it would to register the same information with incidental learning.

Now, imagine a child with severe vision loss entering the room.

Imagine how much longer it would take for this child to learn the information that you learned in one second with one glance. How much time using touch, smell, taste, and hearing would it take to discover the height of the walls, the location of windows and doors, and the safety of the space. How much time to go over each inch of the room to locate furniture or people or snacks?

It would easily take the child hours to get the information, if she was persistent and did not give up.

After exploring for hours, she still may not understand because she cannot see how the information she has gathered with her hands, ears, and other senses fits together. She needs someone to explain to her what she is feeling, hearing, smelling, and tasting to help her create meaning from her experience.

If it takes hours for a young child with severe vision loss to process information about one room that a typically sighted child gets in a few seconds, how much longer will it take that child to learn about the world she lives in?

It takes a lot of **time, patience**, and **expertise** to introduce the world to a child who is blind or who has low vision. **Parents cannot do it alone.**

A young child with severe vision loss needs frequent, ongoing visits from a Teacher of the Visually Impaired. She needs Early Interventionists who have had extensive training in working with children with vision loss.

**Caring for a child who is blind does not come naturally to many sighted parents.** They need frequent, ongoing visits to ask questions and to learn from early intervention providers**.**

## REMEMBER:

* **Parents of children with vision loss entering an early intervention program can request a Teacher of the Visually Impaired to consult with other providers as well as the family.**
* **Parents can ask providers how much training and experience they have had in working with children with vision loss.**
* **Parents of children with CVI can ask Teachers of the Visually Impaired and early interventionists how much training and experience they have had working with children with CVI.**
* **Parents can request that their service providers get training in working with children who have CVI. The CVI endorsement offered at Perkins would be a good place to start.**
* **Parents have the right to ask for another provider if they think their provider or TVI do not understand CVI or vision loss in general.**

*You are advocating for your child’s quality of life. It starts now.*