

Trauma can significantly affect the way a child processes visual sensory input. The brain's response to trauma often prioritises survival, heightening the alertness of sensory systems, including vision. This heightened state can lead to hypervigilance, where the child is constantly scanning their environment for potential threats. Over time, this can disrupt typical visual processing and impact how a child perceives and interacts with their surroundings.

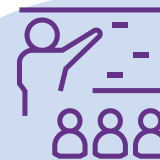


What might you notice

Hypervigilance and Visual Processing

Hypervigilance is a state of heightened awareness and sensitivity to sensory stimuli, especially visual input.

- **Increased Sensitivity:** They may become overwhelmed by visual stimuli, such as bright lights, busy patterns, or fast movements, leading to sensory overload.
- **Difficulty Filtering Information:** Hypervigilance can make it hard to focus on relevant visual details (e.g., text on a page) while ignoring irrelevant ones (e.g., a classmate's movements).
- **Scanning Behaviour:** The child may constantly monitor their environment, shifting their gaze frequently to check for threats, which can interfere with sustained attention.
- **Distorted Perception:** Trauma may alter how visual information is interpreted, causing a child to misread facial expressions, gestures, or other social cues.



Impact on learning

- **Difficulty with Focus and Attention**

Constant scanning of the environment can make it hard for the child to focus on tasks such as reading, writing, or listening to the teacher. Visual distractions (e.g., movement in the room, posters, or bright lights) may feel overwhelming.

- **Challenges with Social Interaction**

Misinterpreting visual cues like facial expressions or body language can lead to misunderstandings with peers or teachers. A child might perceive neutral or friendly interactions as threatening due to their heightened state of alertness.

- **Reduced Academic Performance**

Struggling to visually focus on materials like books, worksheets, or screens can hinder learning.

Visual overload may cause fatigue, frustration, or avoidance behaviours, such as refusing to engage in tasks.

- **Behavioural Responses**

The child might appear restless, avoidant, or disruptive as they attempt to manage their heightened visual sensitivity.

They may seek out safe, less visually stimulating spaces, such as corners or under desks.



VISUAL HACKS

Strategies for children who are sensitive to visual input

Classroom Environment

- Use soft, neutral colours for walls and furniture to reduce visual overstimulation.
- Limit clutter in the classroom by keeping displays and materials minimal and organised.
- Provide visual boundaries (e.g. tape or dividers) to help children create personal space and reduce visual distractions.
- Reduce brightly coloured or flashing visuals in the classroom to avoid overstimulating the visual system.
- Use low-contrast visual materials that are easier to process (e.g. avoid bold neon colours and opt for pastel or muted tones).
- Install window coverings or blinds to control natural light and prevent glare.
- Ensure the use of clear, uncluttered visual cues for tasks, instructions, and classroom routines.
- Reduce visual distractions around the board / where the focus of attention should be



Learning Supports

- Use a finger or ruler to mark where reading
- Use a reading window
- Use an angled writing surface to reduce the distance the eyes have to travel from the board to the paper
- Provide a written sheet on the desk to copy from rather than copying from the board
- Use large print books/work sheets
- Avoid white paper, try others colours such as cream, or pastel colours. Use of coloured overlays.
- Provide visual scaffolding for learning, such as visual aids, diagrams, and step-by-step guides
- Use a visual organiser (e.g. a mind map or checklist) to break down complex tasks into manageable steps.

Lighting

- Lamp lighting is less visually stressful than overhead lighting
- Keep lights dimmed
- Use natural light where possible
- Seat student away from the source of light/ close blinds if sun is too bright
- Turn off overhead lights in certain areas of the classroom
- Try fluorescent light filters to reduce glare of harsh lighting



Classroom Position

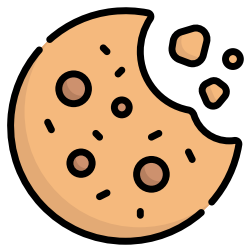
- Seat near the front of the classroom in the direction where the child needs to face to learn
- Some children feel more secure closer to a wall, with a view of the door (but not directly in front)
- Be mindful of traffic/walk ways in front of the child's desk eg; near to bin, toilet, water bottle area.
- Clearly define different areas of the room with visual boundaries using rugs or low dividers to create distinct and manageable spaces
- Ensure the child has a clear line of sight to visual materials (e.g. whiteboards, projectors) without being too close to them.
- Some children prefer to be towards the back of the classroom with their back to the wall for increased sense of safety. Ask the child where their preferred seating would be.



Individual Supports

- Allow the student to wear lightly tinted sunglasses or dark sunglasses if necessary
- Allow the student to wear a hood up or hat on indoors as a way to minimise visual input and to regulate/feel safer.
- Seat the student in a darker area of the classroom if possible e.g. away from windows and light sources
- Provide desk partitions or boundaries to reduce distractions and help the student concentrate on their work and what is going on in their immediate visual field.
- Limit the number of people and visual stimuli in hallways during transition times to reduce sensory overwhelm.



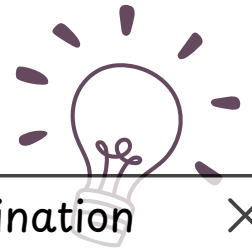


VISUAL SNACKS

Soothing sensory strategies to try



Regulate to
LEARN



Calming Visual Input



- Slow moving visuals
- Lava lamp
- Bubble tube
- Neutral environments
- Fairy lights
- Dimmed lighting
- Hooded blankets
- Rhythm lights in darkened room

Transition Support



- Visual schedules: Use a picture or icon-based schedule to help children anticipate transitions and reduce anxiety about what's coming next.
- Visual countdowns: A timer or visual countdown to indicate how much time remains before a transition occurs, offering predictability.
- Gentle visual prompts: Use soft, slow-moving light displays or calming images to indicate it's time for the next activity (e.g., slow visual animation for cleaning up).
- Familiar, consistent symbols for routines: Always use the same set of symbols or images for transitions, such as the same icon for "break" or "tidy-up time," to build predictability.
- Choice boards: Provide the child with a visual choice board for them to pick what comes next, offering a sense of control during transitions.
- Routine cards for specific times of day: Use cards that show what will happen next during the day (e.g., a card with a picture of lunch or a book for storytime).
- Use coloured fabric to highlight peg, so the child can easily find their place.
- Label belongings with bright tags for children who need more visual input to locate their items.



Voice of the child Questions to ask

- Where in the classroom do you feel you do your best learning?
- Is there something in the classroom that is distracting for your eyes?
- What would you change about how the classroom looks?
- How do your eyes feel when your working?/ Copying from the board/ reading?
- How do you know when your eyes need a break?
- Is there anywhere in school that makes your eyes feel busy?

Visual Discrimination



- Large, clear font materials: Use simple, large-text worksheets, labels, or posters to support visual discrimination and reduce visual stress.
- Contrasting background colours: Provide high contrast between text and background colours (e.g., dark text on light backgrounds) for easier readability.
- Simple, clear graphics: Provide children with materials that use minimal, clear, and simple images that avoid too much visual detail or busyness.
- Chunking information visually: Break tasks into visual segments or sections, so the child can focus on one part of the task at a time.
- Wheres Wally type search and find books
- Pattern recognition activities, sorting activities, spot the difference games, mazes and wordsearches to work on visual discrimination

Individual Supports



- Provide visual task lists: Offer clear, step-by-step visuals for tasks, so the child can follow instructions visually at their own pace.
- Use visual examples or demonstrations: Show the child what a completed task looks like with a visual model, so they can better understand expectations.
- Allow for drawing or doodling as a calming tool: Provide paper or a whiteboard where the child can draw or write to process their thoughts during tasks.
- Offer access to a visual notebook or tablet: Allow children to use a tablet or notebook to visually organise thoughts, tasks, or learning content.
- Highlight important information visually: Use coloured markers, underlining, or stickers to visually emphasise key points of information.
- Visual check-ins: Provide a visual "check-in" board or system where the child can indicate their understanding of tasks or emotions.
- Offer flexible work environments: Allow the child to work in different visual settings, such as in a quiet space or with calming visual aids, depending on their needs.
- Schedule screen time for working eg; allow laptop working or tablet working at intervals
- Trial LCD Writing Tablet for engagement in writing tasks

