Chapter 3
General Guidelines for Learning Activities

This chapter describes some of the general guidelines parents have found helpful when teaching their child new skills. Try using these guidelines in addition to the specific instructions for each activity in Chapters 5 through 8, and Chapters 10 and 11.

You are the expert about your child

No one knows your child and his abilities as well as you do. Listen to your feelings and experiences about how your child is doing, even if they are different from what a doctor, health worker, teacher or this book is telling you. You can learn a lot from people who have experience with children who have vision problems, but every child is different. You are the expert about your child.

Let your child take the lead

Play is an important way for children to learn about the world. A child is most eager to play when he is doing something he likes. So if your child shows interest in an object, person, or activity, use his play to help him learn new skills.

Letting your child take the lead helps him learn that his choices are important and that he has some control over what happens. But it does not mean that everything is unplanned. You need to think about the skills your child needs to learn (see page 12), and the kinds of activities and objects that can help him learn these skills. Then you can think of ways to help him learn more while he is playing.

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② Will your toy fit in this box, Hector?

③ Now let's make the toy fall out!

Adapt activities for your child

A child can learn a certain skill in many different ways. You can adapt the activities in this book to best suit your child, your family and your community.

As you do activities with your child, you will find ways of doing things that interest him and make him want to do something...
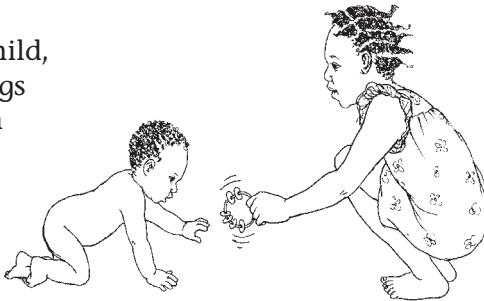
...and you will learn what upsets him or makes him want to stop.

Noah seems to be afraid to slide by himself. But maybe he will be willing to try sliding if I stand nearby and talk to him.

I don't have blocks but these cans are just as good.

You can adapt activities to make use of materials you already have. For example, if an activity in this book shows a child using a toy, you do not need to make or buy that same toy. Instead, use whatever is readily available.

Adapt activities so they fit in with your daily work and your family's activities.

The book said to help Visit strengthen his hands. Arranging the fruits at our market stand will help him and help me too.

First, try activities yourself

As you prepare to teach your child, try each activity yourself, thinking about each step. This will help you think of the best way to teach your child.
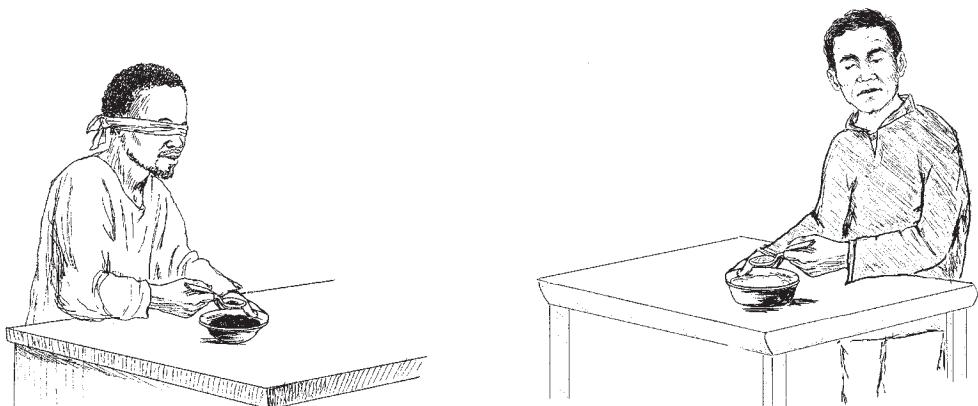
This father is learning how to feed himself without being able to see.

This father is learning how to feed himself when he can see only the area off to the side.

Work from behind your child

Yaso, can I put my hands on yours to help you?

When you are showing your child how to do a new activity, like feeding or dressing himself, it may be easier for him to understand your movements if you are behind him. Sometimes it works well to put your hands over his. But be sure to ask him first if it is okay.

Be consistent

Try to teach a skill in the same way each time, using the same words and steps. You will need to do different kinds of activities because children do not stay interested in one thing for very long. But try not to change the way you talk about and teach each skill. It also helps to begin and end activities with the same words or actions. This way a child will know that the activity is changing.

Supper is over, Pepe.
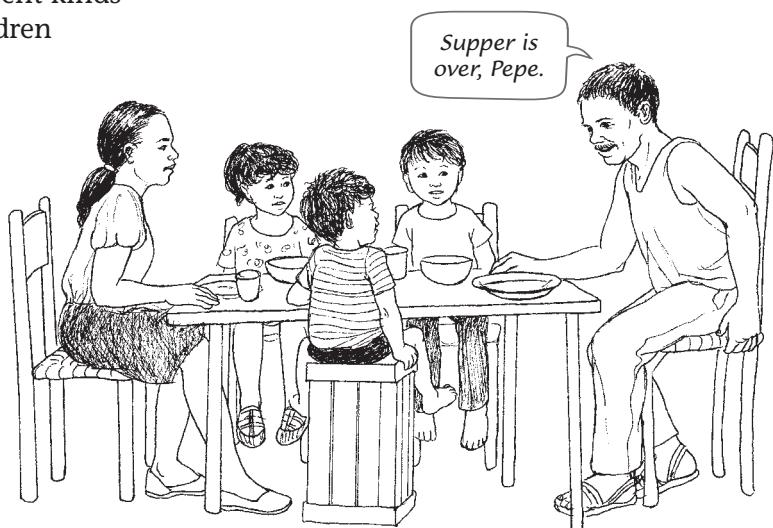
Pepe's father says these words each time the family finishes supper.

Allow your child enough time

A child who has difficulty seeing takes longer to do things, at least at first. He needs time to think about what you have asked him to do and about how he will respond. So be sure to give him enough time to be successful at what he does.

He always waits a few moments before he begins to eat.

Let your child know how he is doing

A child who does not see well cannot see how close he is to completing a task, so he needs you to let him know. Otherwise he may get discouraged, not realizing how much he has already done. And be sure to tell him when he does something well. All children need praise.

Good, Kofi. You have only one more button to do.

Hear the water? I'm washing the floor, Kam San. It gets dirty after everyone walks on it.
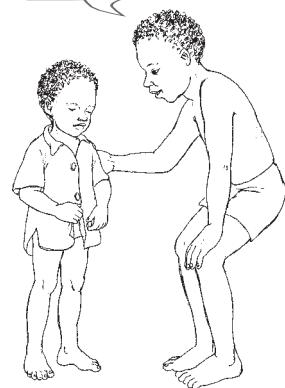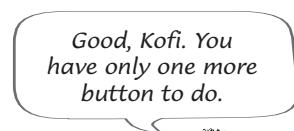
Let your child know what is happening around him

A child who can see knows a lot about what is happening around him. He knows, for example, who is in the room, who is talking, what other people are doing, and where sounds come from. A blind child learns to use his senses to know many of these same things. You can help him learn about his surroundings by describing and showing him what is going on.

Remember how children learn

When you are teaching a child a new skill, he will learn it in stages.

First, he learns to do the skill with help.

Put your arms up like this, José, to protect you.
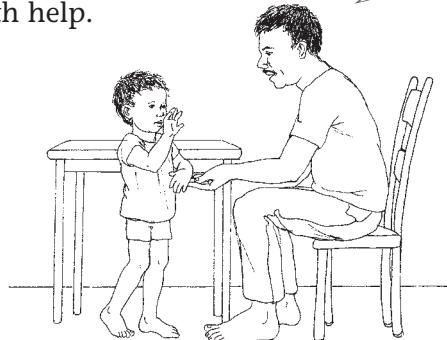
Then he remembers how to do it all by himself.
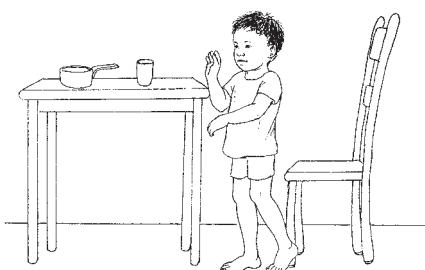
Finally, he uses the skill in new situations.

Good, José. Now you know how to walk safely outside, too.
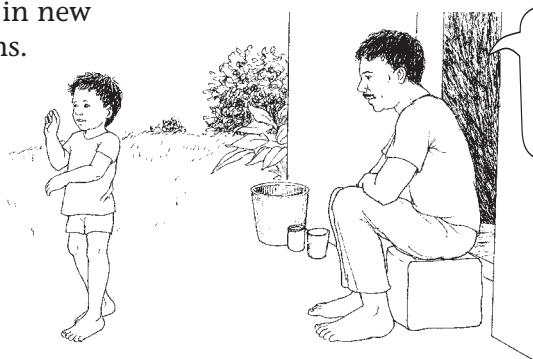
Try to be aware of all 3 stages as you teach your child. Remember, also, that all children need a lot of practice before they completely learn a new skill.

Many of the activities in this book need you to give your child a lot of help at first. But as he begins to master a skill, give him less and less help. For example, when your child is learning to feed himself:

At first you may put your hands over his hands and move his arms.

Kofi, here come the yams.

As you feel him start to do some of the activity himself, loosen your hold on his hand. Then gradually move your hand to his wrist and lower arm...

I'm putting my hand on your arm to give you a little help.

...and then to his elbow.

That's it, Kofi. You are starting to feed yourself.
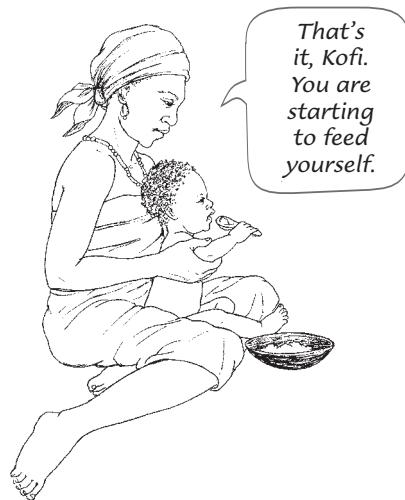
Encourage your child to be independent

It is natural to want to help your child do things. But be careful about helping your child so much that he does not have a chance to learn how the world works. For example:
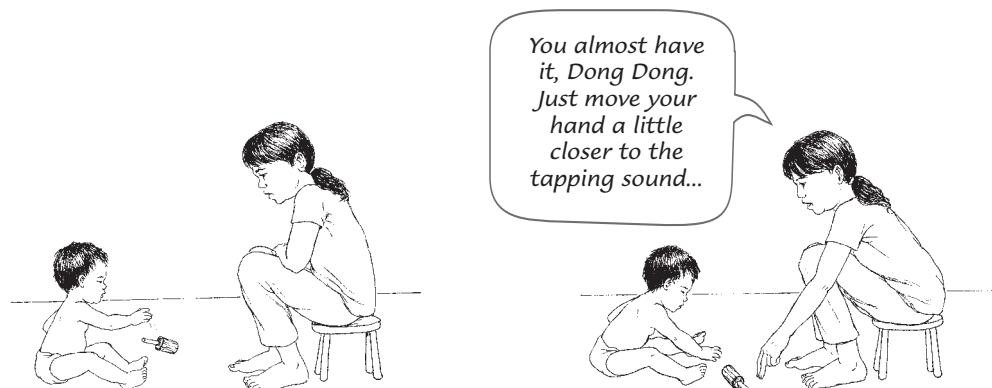
When a child drops a toy, it is natural to want to pick it up and give it to him...

...but he will learn more if you help him find the toy himself.

Make the best use of your child's remaining sight

If your child can see a little, try to do activities that make use of his remaining sight. The next chapter explains how.