VISUAL PERCEPTION

Visual perception allows your child to interpret and make sense of what they see within their environment. These skills begin to develop from birth and continue into childhood. Good visual perceptual skills are important for every day tasks such as completing puzzles and jigsaws, cutting, drawing, recognising shapes and letters, copying information correctly from the board at school, reading, self-care skills and even being able to find their sock on the bedroom floor.
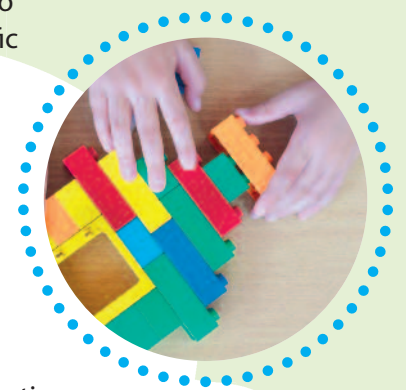
The following strategies are commonly used in Occupational Therapy and are recommended to develop your child's visual perception skills;

● **WHAT SHAPE IS THIS?**

◆ Talk about the shape of everyday items such as the orange is round like a circle. The box is like a square, it has four sides/corners.

◆ Play games by looking for circles in their environment for example lets see who can find something round like a circle first. This might include pointing to traffic lights, a door knob, a cushion, a circular mirror, or a button.

◆ Put a number of blocks together that are different shapes, ask your child to point to the circle, square, triangle.

◆ When drawing or colouring refer to the shapes that are seen. For example lets colour the circle red. When drawing a house refer to the square shape and the triangular roof or the circular door knob.

● **SPATIAL AWARENESS :** It is important that your child becomes familiar with direction and the position of objects. This includes in front, behind, to the side, over, under, right and left.

◆ Ask your child if they can put teddy on top of the pillow, under the chair, behind the curtain, in front of the chair and so on.

◆ When sentence writing learning about the distance and space needed between words can sometimes be difficult. Your child will need to learn to use a prompt such as their finger space or lollipop stick to help them to learn about the distance required.

◆ When beginning to read or when looking at pictures in a story book remind your child to scan from the left to the right. Talk to your child about starting to read or look at the pictures on the left side of the page first.

◆ When learning to position letters on the line, give your child prompts such as all the letters must sit on the grass. The is in relation to the sky, grass, mud concept from the Handwriting Without Tears Programme. Draw the sky, grass, mud symbols into the copybook to help you child to remember this.
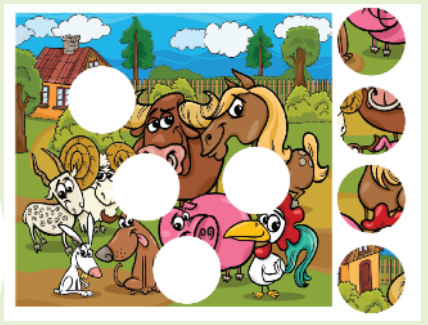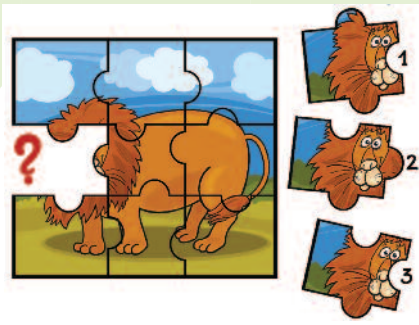
- **USING THEIR EYES TO GUIDE HAND MOVEMENTS:**
Hand eye coordination is important for your child to develop when learning to catch a ball or when copying information using their pencil.

  - ◆ Practise copying games using your child's toys. Can you copy my tower? Can you copy my peg board pattern? Can you copy the lego pattern? Can you copy the dot to dot pattern?

  - ◆ Copy a jigsaw pattern using the completed picture on the box.

  - ◆ Practise copying shapes using crayons or pencils. Copy the circle. Copy the square. Copy the house.

  - ◆ Ball games rely on good hand eye coordination. Games could include throwing a ball through a target, catching a ball with two hands or bowling.

  - ◆ Good hand eye coordination is essential when copying information correctly from the board at school. Practise copying drawings and diagrams from workbooks at home.

- **MATCHING AND SORTING:**

  - ◆ Matching card games help your child to recognise objects that are similar in shape or shapes that are different.

  - ◆ Toys that have a matching pair can also be used. For examples ask your child to find the farm animals friends? Can you find the matching pair?

  - ◆ Ask your child for help pairing similar socks.

  - ◆ Spot the difference worksheets, colour matching, sorting cutlery in drawer and Dominoes.

- **FINDING OBJECTS AMONGST OTHERS:** This is important for your child to develop so that they can find objects quickly such as when trying to find a pencil in their pencil case.

  - ◆ Can you find Mr Hippo amongst all of your favourite teddies?

  - ◆ Can you find the spider sticker amongst all the other stickers?

  - ◆ Where's Wally books.

  - ◆ Wordsearches.

  - ◆ Finding forks in a cutlery drawer.

  - ◆ Picking out the red beads from a containers of beads.

  - ◆ If your child has difficulty in this area a see through pencil case can help your child to find things quickly in class.

- **BEING ABLE TO RECOGNISE AN OBJECT WHEN ONLY PART OF THE OBJECT CAN BE SEEN:**
Draw or hide half a shape/object and ask your child if they know what it could be. Use Jigsaws. Dot to Dot pattern workbooks.

- **CAN YOUR CHILD FORM A MENTAL PICTURE OF SHAPES, OBJECTS AND LETTERS?**
This is called visualisation.

  ◆ Reading to a child helps develop strong visualization skills as the child "pictures" the story in their mind.

  ◆ Looking at an object and then removing it from sight and asking the child to describe it.

  ◆ Playing imaginary games, imagine a big elephant in the garden, what does it look like, what colour is it, imagine a big hippo in the bath.

- **CAN YOUR CHILD KEEP THEIR EYES FOCUSED ON A TASK:** This is called visual attention. To help your child to develop visual attention skills use card games, a guess who game, connect four, draughts, chess or word-searches.

- **HELP YOUR CHILD TO SCAN LEFT TO RIGHT OR TOP TO BOTTOM:**
As mentioned earlier when discussing direction, this skill can be developed when starting to read, when completing word-searches, finding Wally in a where's wally book, and general scanning games such as see if you can find as may b's as you can in this sentence.

- **LETTER FORMATION:** Having good hand eye coordination, being able to recognise shapes and having a knowledge of left and right is beneficial when starting to learn letters. Use a letter or number chart to copy from. Use arrows to help your child learn the direction.

- **LETTER REVERSALS:** Make up rhymes to help with letter formation. Common letters that are reversed include b and d, s and z, i and j. A useful rhyme for the letter 'd' may be to make your c before you turn it into a d or c comes before d. Complete cancellation games where your child needs to circle all the b's and cross out all the d's in a paragraph/newspaper.

Cork & Kerry Primary Care Paediatric Occupational Therapy Departments