

Mannerisms/Blindisms in Children Severely Sight Impaired



When a child is severely sight impaired they may have a tendency to push their fingers or knuckles into their eyes and this may become a repetitive habit, similar to nail biting or chewing fingers. Eye touching behaviours are part of a group of mannerisms adopted by visually impaired children, known as blindisms.

What are Blindisms/Mannerisms?

Blindisms are repetitive, seemingly purposeless body movements, which can become habits – learned behaviours, which may manifest as:

- **Rocking** – which can indicate boredom, stress or the need for comfort. Rocking may also be an indication that the child is not receiving appropriate external stimulation, resulting in the child resorting to using his/her own body to receive a form of external stimulation. Rocking may also occur when a child becomes excited or agitated.
- **Flicking fingers** in front of their eyes - provides the child with the stimulation of constant movement, children can also use this mannerism when the child is bored or excited. Often children who are easily aroused flap their arms in space, this behaviour helps the child with a visual impairment, to focus and screen out confusing visual information and helps to release tensions.
- **Blindisms** may also be more common in infancy, before the child learns how to interact with the real world; ways of helping to avoid blindisms is to introduce new experiences to the child.

Eye Poking and Rubbing?

Why do they do it?

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| Sensation | - | provides a form of visual sensation and chemically triggers constellations of light – stars |
| Enjoyment | - | Poking the softness of the eye, feels “squiggy”, which provides a pleasant sensation |

for the child.

Can Indicate - tiredness, boredom, stress, excitement, agitation

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT IT?

Try to prevent it by using verbal feedback at the first hint of the behaviour, talking to the child may help to reduce or stop the mannerism becoming learned behaviour. Verbal feedback could be way of simple cues, “you are poking your eyes”, accompanied by a gentle touch, attempting to redirect the child’s attention.

Occasionally drawing too much attention to the behaviour may strengthen the behaviour. Consider non-prescription glasses for a short time; glasses make it more difficult for your child to access their eyes.

Vigilance is required and hopefully, with the support of teachers, family and friends, as the child gets older he/she will probably control his/her mannerisms on their own. It has been noted that children who have parents who are vigilant often experience good results regarding curtailing their child’s eye poking behaviour.

When the child learns to interact with others the behaviour can get better.

HOW DANGEROUS IS EYE POKING?

Eye poking, appears to be a mannerism/behaviour, with some specific eye conditions, constant eye poking can result in the sockets becoming sunken. Eye poking does have the potential to cause problems. There have been statements that constant eye poking can cause retinal detachment or infections in certain conditions.

Conditions such as congenital Glaucoma, where pressures build up in the eye, or congenital Cataracts and the use of contact lenses, or following operations, may give cause for concerns regarding eye poking causing infections.

EYE POKING CAN BE DISTRESSING FOR PARENTS

Parents are often concerned regarding their child eye poking and are interested in changing their child’s behaviour. The parents of young children may not be aware that eye poking is a blind mannerism. Eye poking can be viewed as anti-social, as it is not seen as socially acceptable, particularly as the child gets older and the mannerism may make the child appear even more different from typical children. The child consequently may become socially isolated. Eye poking can also be seen as immature behaviour and due to the visual impairment, children and young people cannot see that other people are not doing the same as them.

To reiterate, the habit of eye poking in children with a visual impairment, should be deterred by parents through gentle, vigilant persuasion.

Disclaimer: Information sheets have been produced to provide information and advice for the parents of visually impaired children. Changes may occur in theories and legislation, however, the information sheets have been written in good faith, as a general guidance tool. If you have any questions with regard to issues raised by the information sheet, please contact the National Blind Children’s Society, National Family Support and Information Manager.

