Memory for Places

Is your child getting lost in familiar places?

Is your child:

- Getting lost at the supermarket?
- Forgetting the way to walk to school?
- Not recognizing familiar landmarks?
- Struggling with telling his right hand from his left?
- Not understanding north, south, east, and west?
- Getting lost at school?
- Feeling terrified in new places?
- Struggling with board games like memory?
- Not remembering that she has been to a certain house before?

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Some children may have trouble remembering how things look. This type of memory is often referred to clinically as *visual memory*. Visual memory is involved with remembering places. Some children with these challenges get lost easily, even when they have been to locations many times before.

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You may feel like you can never take your eye off your child at the mall or other public place. You may become nervous at a zoo or very crowded venue because your child will wander off and forget where he is.

Your child may forget that she has been to this house, even though you have been to it several times. It may be that your child goes to the neighborhood park and cannot navigate the way home. Games requiring quick thinking and visual strategies, such as chess or checkers, may be hard for him or her. Children with poor visual memory may not be able to read a map or to follow directions.

It may be hard for your child to understand a direction like, 'go up the stop-sign and make a right.' Or, maybe your teenager forgets the way to the grocery store that is just down the street.

CLINICAL DESCRIPTION

Problems with visual memory may be related to the following aspects: visual sequencing, visual tracking, visual perception, visual planning, attention, or emotional regulation.

***Visual Sequencing* means visually putting things in order or noticing the visual pattern. Children with these challenges may have trouble remembering how objects look or where they are supposed to go; such as the patterns found in reading and math.**

Visual Tracking means following words on a page as you read or an object as it moves through space. Children with these difficulties may have trouble reading and may not be able to catch a ball.

Visual Perception refers to recognizing and perceiving visual stimuli effectively. Children with these challenges are having general problems seeing objects the way others do.

Visual Planning means scanning and thinking through moves and visualizing what something will look like when a move has been made. Children with these problems may struggle in sports that require strategy and may avoid games like basketball or football where they must remember plays or visual instructions.

Children who struggle with any of the visual skills mentioned may require assessment by a developmental ophthalmologist or eye doctor. Some types of vision therapy or occupational therapy can help with eye tracking problems.

Attention: Regarding attention, shifting attention refers to the ability to shift focus back and forth between stimuli. Sustained Attention is the ability to maintain attention to a task in the absence of immediate reward. Children with attention problems do not

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remember faces and places because they were not paying attention in the first place. Significant problems with attention should be assessed by a psychologist.

Emotional regulation: Finally, challenges with visual memory can be emotionally charged. It will be important here to rule out anything related to trauma. Sometimes, lapses in memory or challenges remembering events or details could be related to triggering emotional events. In this case, it will be important to have the child evaluated by a psychologist.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CHILD GETS LOST AT THE MARKET

Visual memory can be a significant problem for many children. The important factor to consider is whether or not your child's memory problems are interfering with schoolwork or friendships.

Children with learning problems may need help in either reading or math because remembering patterns and sequences is important in these subjects. For example, spelling may be very challenging if your child struggles with visual memory. Math facts may also be a challenge. If the child has experienced a traumatic event, memory can be impacted. In this case, the child should be seen by a psychologist right away. More moderate symptoms may be treated by a vision therapist.

Finally, if the child's problems are milder and are not currently 'getting in the way,' visual memory may not be cause for major concern. Instead, parents and educators may help children by teaching strategies for remembering. For example, it may help to prime the child in advance by telling him what he will see and prompting him to remember it.

You might say, 'Now, we haven't been here before. You will need to remember this place tomorrow. What landmarks do you see? How will you remember to go right at the end of this hall?'

Further, children with poor visual memory may be more kinesthetic or emotional learners. That is, they may need to attach meaning or feeling to a place before remembering it. In that case, parents and educators can help by telling the child about the meaning and significance of a place or person.

SIMILAR SYMPTOMS

If your child is struggling with a similar problem, not directly addressed in this section, see the list below for links to information about other related symptom areas.

- Body space awareness [5]: difficulty remembering places may be due to poor body space awareness (self-awareness of where a person is, how close objects

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are to him or her, identification of body parts). Standing too close or failing to read social cues may be an issue

- Drawing: difficulty remembering places may be due to poor spatial awareness. Drawing familiar shapes and figures may also be impaired
- Attention (Focusing): difficulties remembering may be due to problems shifting or sustaining attention
- Spatial: difficulty remembering places may be due to poor understanding of the way objects look in space. This problem could impact reading, writing, or other areas of learning.
- Emotion Regulation or Attachment: difficulty remembering places may be due to trauma experiences or extreme emotions
- Learning problems (Learning): difficulty remembering places could be related to challenges with reading or writing

POTENTIAL DISABILITIES

*Children who have significant problems in this area may have any of the following potential disabilities. *Note, this information does not serve as a diagnosis in any way. See the 'Where to Go for Help' section for professionals who can diagnose or provide a referral.*

- Developmental Coordination Disorder: challenges with fine motor skills, likely including poor handwriting may relate to getting lost in familiar places
- Dyslexia (Educationally Identified Disabilities): challenges with reading may relate to visual memory problems may relate to getting lost in familiar places
- Dysgraphia (Educationally Identified Disabilities): if challenges with writing are due to visual or motor processing deficits there may also be issues with getting lost in familiar places
- Autism: if challenges in visual-motor skills are accompanied with social delays, it may be an early sign of autism. Problems with body-space awareness and reading non-verbal cues may signal autism in some children who get lost in familiar places
- ADHD: if problems with attention and disinhibition are causing a child to get lost in familiar places
- Trauma or extreme emotional symptoms: if the child is very emotional or struggles significantly with regulating emotions, memory may also be impaired which can cause some children to get lost in familiar places

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WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

If your child is struggling with this symptom to the point that it is getting in the way of his learning, relationships, or happiness, the following professionals could help; they may offer diagnosis, treatment, or both.

- CLEAR Child Psychology: to obtain a *customized profile* of concerns for your child or to *consult 'live'* with a psychologist
- Physical Therapist and/or Occupational Therapist: to look at fine and gross motor skills
- Psychologist or Neuropsychologist: to consider symptoms in context, as they may be related to visual spatial problems, attention, or learning
- Optometrist or Ophthalmologist: to check the child's vision

These professionals may recommend the following tests for this symptom:

- MVPT-4: assesses areas of visual perception
- Beery VMI sequence: assesses visual-motor integration, visual perception and motor coordination
- WISC-V: assesses IQ. Specifically, clinicians can look at visual tracking and visual motor using tasks of block design, coding, symbol search and cancellation
- DAS-2: assesses cognitive ability. Provides a spatial index score consisting of a block design task and a copying or recalling designs subtest. Concerns can be assessed using the spatial index score.
- WIAT-III or WJ-IV: assesses academics in reading, writing, or math
- TOWL: assesses writing skills and provides standard, age and grade equivalent scores
- Writing Samples: assesses the classroom impact of visual-spatial skills and handwriting problems

LEARN MORE

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Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Memory-Book-Classic-Improving-School-ebook/dp/B006Q1SQCQ/

[3] Higbee, Kenneth. (2008) Your Memory: How it works and how to improve it (A book about Mneumonics) Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Your-Memory-How-Works-Improve-ebook/dp/B00D0UZZFW/

[4] Sousa, David A. (2016) *How the Brain Learns*. Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/How-Brain-Learns-David-Sousa/dp/1506346308/

[5] Cook, Julia (2012). *Personal space camp.*
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