Baby and Toddler Childcare Guide

by S. George (secondary teacher)

Children with Albinism feel no different to anyone else - they just do things differently! Assistance from teachers/assistants to access the curriculum alongside peers will be necessary. They are enabled by excellent memory, other senses, ability to adapt and to efficiently use the sight that they do have. In fact they become so good at it that they can easily trick you into thinking that they see more than they actually can. Encourage independence, resilience and an "I can do it" attitude.

About their vision

- All children with albinism have different levels of sight and each child's vision will vary with changes in lighting, distance from object, levels of tiredness or illness.
- They usually do not see fine detail, have poor depth perception, are slow to focus on things and have difficulty tracking moving objects.
- Many will have nystagmus (wobbly eyes) that will speed up when tired or stressed, further reducing functional vision. Others will be photophobic (extremely sensitive to glare causing pain).
- Some may be legally blind with over 6/60 vision (what you see at 60 metres they will only see at 6 metres) and others may have as good as 6/24 vision or better.

What does this mean?

- When they first arrive you may see them quietly move around the edge of the room – they are "mapping" the room, checking out floor surfaces and memorising where everything is.
- They may not see changes in surface, steps, judge distance, track moving objects (other children, balls etc) and need more time to look at things, especially if it is glary.
- They will see a person, but unless they are very close, will not see facial features and miss non-verbal communication. While they need to understand personal space, other children need to understand they need to be exceptionally close to see the person or object clearly.
- Once they are familiar with the area they will often not appear to be too different from peers, but unless accommodations are made, they will not access activities equally.

Accommodations in the room

- Seat them near you, with their back to the window or source of bright light. Make sure you do not have the light source behind you (or they will only see your shadow).
- Ensure they are close enough to see pictures or view what is happening (have their own book).
- All pictures should be simple, high contrast and uncluttered. Lots of detail is difficult to see.
- Ask them to describe what they see (not "can you see that" as they will usually just say "yes").
- Verbalise what is going on in the room (to all children) so that they can follow what is happening. (eg. "Mrs Smith has just come into the room", "The wind made the door bang")
- Use students' names as you ask or answer their questions, so that they know who is talking.
- Give directional instructions (under the red window) rather than "over there" or gesture.

Going outside to play

- Always wear hat and sunglasses to protect the eyes from glare (even on a cloudy day).
- The child with white hair and skin will burn severely within minutes without sun protection at any time of the year! Keep a box at the door for hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, long sleeved shirt.
- Reapply sunscreen each time they go out (unless parents supply one which will last half day).
- When they begin climbing, remember that they may not have any depth perception!
- MOST IMPORTANTLY – ENCOURAGE THEM TO DO EVERYTHING, TREAT THEM EQUALLY!
- Have a mobility specialist visit to assess the environment to highlight hazards and ensure safety.