The BEE: Early Literacy and Movement for Young Blind Children

NFB Braille Reading Pals Club & NFB Early Explorers

April 2016

## What’s Buzzing with the National Federation of the Blind?

## April is always a busy time for the National Federation of the Blind. In addition to preparing for summer programs, many people are getting ready for our national convention in Orlando, Florida, from June 30 to July 5. Preregistration is now open until May 31. This is a great time to meet new friends, reconnect with old ones, and find out about many important accomplishments and endeavors in the world of blindness. There will be a week full of activities for blind children and their parents during this convention. The National Organization of Parents of Blind Children runs a conference in conjunction with the NFB National Convention. You can find information about the national convention at <https://nfb.org/convention> and the NOPBC Conference at <http://nopbc.org/programs-and-events/itemlist/category/13-2016-nopbc-conference-nfb-national-convention>. Those who attend will have an experience they will treasure for years.

## Literacy Hints from the Hive

## It's April, a time for jokes, warmer weather, and sometimes those famous April showers. But, when showers are pounding on the roof and streaming down the windows, it's a good time to stay inside and play board games! And board games, or card games, are a great way to build Braille literacy. It's fun to use Braille to read the names of places on a board, numbers on cards, or instructions to a game. Sometimes, as with bingo for example, many words, letters, and phrases need to be read and marked. It is excellent Braille practice and makes practicing Braille fun when working as a team or against an opponent. You can also practice Braille reading speed if you are playing a game that needs to move more quickly. For card games such as Uno, the numbers and differing directions can be an added challenge. Another excellent literacy-building game is a word search. I have not been able to find books of them already Brailled, but you could Braille word search puzzles for your child. My mom used to Braille them for me and I spent a lot of time completing them. It's a good way to practice letters, spelling, and circling with a pen, crayon, or pencil, as well as concepts like horizontal, diagonal, and vertical. What games do you like to play that help you read Braille? If you don't feel like playing a game, use a Braille Scrabble board and challenge your child to spell words. This is also great Braille letter practice! Happy reading!

## Travel Tales

## April is usually the time for spring break which means more outdoor travel. As kids begin to explore more outdoors, I always think about the music canes make. There's the high-pitched singing of a cane tip along a chain-link fence, the splash of a cane in a puddle, and the rhythmic tapping of a confident kid running to the place he wants to go. All of these sounds blend into the happy song of a blind cane traveler beginning to learn to live the life he wants. Sometimes kids like to spend time listening to this music, learning what certain sounds mean. This is important. Try to plan time in your walks together to make this possible. Find places where there will be different sounds coming from the cane including different textured sidewalks, walls, railings, fences, and grates. Doors make a different sound than a wall. Let your child try to tell the difference. If you don't have time to fully explore when your child wants to, bring him back another day. Early exploring is important for later travel alone.

## A Taste of Honey

## Expect Cuteness to Fade

## Both blind and sighted children are born as cute and adorable babies who grow into cute and adorable toddlers. They do many cute and adorable things. Somewhere along the way though, sighted children outgrow many of their cute behaviors and habits such as sucking their thumb, rocking back and forth, and chewing on toys. They become busy preschoolers, and later, mature children ready for school. If they continue these cute or not-so-cute behaviors, they are usually quickly corrected. Many blind children, however, are allowed to act much younger than their age. They are allowed to keep their "cute" younger habits far beyond when their peers have grown out of theirs. Some children do not notice that they behave younger, some think it is cute, and some finally notice when their peers make fun of them when they are at school. This may occur because some blind children spend more time with adults than their peers, or because some tend to be only children and don't have siblings to interact with and to compare themselves. It may occur because adults expect them to be slightly behind because they are blind, or because adults find some of their behaviors cute and don't realize that as they get older the behaviors will be less cute and harder to change. Here are two examples of behaviors that sometimes go on too long and should be stopped before they can embarrass a child and cause problems at school.

## The first example of such a behavior is eavesdropping on adult conversations, reacting to them, and parroting parts of them back to the adults. This can be cute when a child is a toddler, but annoying and inappropriate for a school-aged child. Another way in which this behavior can manifest itself is when a child constantly repeats parts of radio and television commercials. This keeps children from appropriately interacting with their peers and having conversations. Eavesdropping a bit on conversations is equivalent to people watching for blind children, and can be all right in certain situations, but a child must learn when it is appropriate and when it is not. She should be focusing on her own conversations or other activities instead.

## Another example of habits that are allowed to continue for long periods of time are bouncing, head-turning, and rocking. These blindisms, which also include eye poking, are not always considered cute but are considered part of a child's personality and are not changed until a child is a teenager or even older. By then, children do not even realize they are engaging in these habits. It is much easier to change these habits when they are younger. Some parents feel that a child cannot help these behaviors. They are partly right; they are habits that the child may not even realize he has acquired. But if they are brought to his attention, they can be changed. A simple signal, like touching him on the shoulder when you notice he is engaging in the behavior, or some other subtle signal the two of you work out, will help your child know he is engaging in the behavior. Another good way to divert the habit, especially for something like rocking, is to find an acceptable way to do it. Have your child rock in a rocking chair for a certain time each day. This will give him the same motion but in an appropriate place. Find an exercise or dance class where your child can move his head in fun ways. He or she can use that bouncy energy in gymnastics, not jumping randomly in place. There are lots of ways to channel these habits into appropriate behaviors.

## Remember that just like their sighted peers, blind kids are growing up every day. The goal is for them to be independent adults. Many people tend to think in the short-term with blind kids. Remember to have high expectations and look towards the long-term, a rich future life as a successful competent blind adult, maybe with cute kids of his or her own!

## Buzzes and Tweets

Follow [@NFB\_Voice](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3730&qid=568205) on Twitter to get news and information from the NFB.

Follow [@BrailleLiteracy](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3731&qid=568205) on Twitter to get timely Braille news, information, and tips.

Like the [National Federation of the Blind on Facebook](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3732&qid=568205) to stay current with all of the new things happening at the NFB Jernigan Institute.

## Books for Busy Bees

If you are looking to expand your child’s Braille library, check out the [Braille storybook resources webpage](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3733&qid=568205) for information on free books, lending libraries, and Braille book retailers.

[The NFB Braille Reading Pals Club](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3734&qid=568205) **and** [NFB Early Explorers](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3735&qid=568205) programs are sponsored in part by the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children and the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults. For more information please contact:

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