

Back to School – A Guide to Planning a Meeting with Your Child’s Teacher

Prepared by The Childhood Glaucoma Research Network (rev. 03/12)

Available at www.gl-foundation.org

You are the expert when it comes to your child. Your child’s teacher(s) and the school staff can take better care of your child along with you if they understand your child’s needs. They can also better teach your child if they know what health and/or vision assistance your child needs (if any).

A good time to talk to the teacher and schedule a meeting to discuss your child is at the Open House (Meet and Greet) before the new school year begins. If your school does not have such a program, feel free to reach out to your child’s teacher or the school principal and request a one-on-one meeting.

Who will attend: Depending on your individual situation and needs, a meeting might include parent(s), your child’s teacher(s), school nurse, school health aid, any others who want to be included such as the principal, special education teachers, physical education teacher, etc. However, this is difficult to coordinate, so do not get discouraged!

Purpose of meeting: To personally meet your child’s new teacher(s), introduce them to your child, and find out if they have experience with childhood glaucoma. You may need to explain glaucoma and offer resources so they can learn more (e.g. CRGN fact sheet and helpful links found on website). You will want to discuss health and safety issues, and identify how the teacher can help your child learn and have success in the classroom.

What to bring and What to do in advance:

- 1) Print and bring Childhood Glaucoma Fact Sheet to the meeting,
- 2) Prepare a checklist or handout to give the teacher with specific information about your child. You can use the prompts on page 2 & 3 of this document to create this handout. You can also refer to examples from other parents on the website.
- 3) Include a picture of your child with this packet to make it more personalized.

Also, bring a list of medications and the bottles that your child must use during the school day. Ask if there are any forms the school requires you and/or your child’s doctor to sign for permission. These forms often include: 1) exact directions regarding which drops must be given during school hours and at what time, and 2) a summary of your child’s medical status regarding their vision and eye condition, including the need for specialized glasses or tint to glasses.

NOTE:

If your child has special vision needs, many countries have formalized programs in place to support the unique educational needs of children with disabilities or special health care needs. In the U.S. you may apply for an individual Education Plan (IEP) multidisciplinary assessment and meeting, which becomes the school’s responsibility to arrange. You can ask your eye doctor or school staff for more information about programs in your country.

You can also ask if your school has access to a specialized vision teacher on an intermittent basis. Inquire how your child may be evaluated by this teacher for potential ongoing support in school.

Health and Safety Discussion Prompts:

- Are your child's eyes vulnerable to injury? (e.g., due to cataract removal, previous glaucoma surgery, especially large eyes, vision impairment)?
- Does your child need protective eyewear (especially is one eye does not see well)?
- Does your doctor suggest a need to refrain from contact or fast ball sports?
- Is your child restricted from using any musical instruments (ie, wind instruments)?
- Has your child had a recent surgery? Are there any things the teacher needs to be aware of? Has your Dr. advised that care be taken to avoid exposure to eye infection?
- Does your child wear contact lenses? If so, talk about what to do in the event of a lost contact lens, red eye, or painful eye.
- Do any medications need to be administered during the school day?
- Is your child sensitive to bright light, and therefore need to wear a hat or sunglasses for outdoor activities, recess or field trips?
- Does your child have difficulty with glare? How might this impact seating in the classroom (especially if there is a white board)?

Learning & Success Discussion Prompts:

- If your child needs to miss school for a doctor's appointment or surgery, discuss instructions for making up class time & if additional help is needed completing assignments.
- If your child has light sensitivity, or other vision impairment, refer to the next section.
- Ask if your school has access to a specialized vision teacher on an intermittent basis. Inquire how your child may be evaluated by this teacher for potential ongoing support in school.

Learning & Success Discussion Prompts for Vision Impairment or Problems?

- It's important that the teacher(s) understand that visually impaired children differ in their ability to use their vision. Two children may have the same measured vision, but one may rely on other senses to perform the same tasks that the other child does by sight.
- Help the teacher understand how your child's usable vision fluctuates throughout the day, depending on factors such as lighting, fatigue, and emotions/stress. Explain that it may take time for the teacher to recognize these fluctuations.
- Discuss specific conditions or situations that can make it difficult for your child to use his/her vision, and therefore may require verbal cues, proximity, or different lighting.
 - For example, if distance vision is poor, the child may not be aware of and therefore may not be interested in events occurring at a distance. He/she may not notice a facial expression, nod, or arm or hand movements asking him/her to come over to you, to respond to a question, or to get an item.
 - If the child is sensitive to light or glare, seating him near a window or demonstrating something in class with your back to a window will cause him to just see a silhouette and may be very difficult.

- Suggest specific actions that the teacher should take. These directions are REALLY important to helping the child become an independent person. For example,
 - Verbal cues may be necessary, address the child by name: "Johnny, on top of the computer in the back of the room, there is a green folder. Can you get it for me?"
 - When demonstrating something in class, have the child sit next to the 'demonstrator' so that he/she can see, or so that he/she is not facing a window.
 - If showing a movie, please let a parent know beforehand. The child may not be able to see very well from a distance. The parent might make a copy of the movie so the child can watch the same movie on a tablet or other electronic device.
 - If doing an art project with glitter or other small particles, please let the parent know beforehand so that the parent might bring in an alternative

Other Things You May Wish To Discuss:

- Help the teacher to get to know your child and what he/she is capable of; and that your child doesn't want to be treated differently because he has glaucoma and/or vision needs.
- Talk openly. As other children get to know your child, they may become interested in his/her eye condition. Talk about how you want the teacher and your child to respond if others ask "why do you wear sunglasses?", "why do you wear an eye patch?", "why do your eyes move?" or "why do you have to sit by the teacher?". Encourage the child to answer these questions, but if he/she is uncomfortable, please answer them for the child. These are valid questions. Glaucoma and vision issues are not something to be ashamed of. Some children even have "show and tell" specifically about glaucoma and the parent may attend.
- Thank the teacher for helping your child be safe and successful in the classroom!