

Werkwijzer

A method for supporting children with
autism spectrum disorders and visual
impairment



Visual impairment and autism spectrum disorders

At Bartiméus we experience an increasing incidence of children with a combination of a visual impairment and an autism spectrum disorder. For professionals this is a complex problem. Where language is used as an important tool for training and support for partially sighted and blind children, this can be confusing for autistic children.

Vice versa, the visual methods used for children with an autism spectrum disorder are not usable for visually impaired children.

What to do when children have both a visual impairment and an autism spectrum disorder, how to meet their special needs?

This was a leading question for the writers of the method and turned out into a practical manual for parents, teachers and other professionals working with these children.

What is the problem?

Because of the combination of impairments, understanding of the environment and what is happening in social and dynamic situations is even more difficult for these children.

On the one hand it is more difficult to understand relations and situations because of the autism: children are more focused on details than on the Gestalt (poor central coherence). On the other hand because of the visual impairment: visual information is less accessible.

Method

An important issue in the method is:

- to enhance and (re-)arrange the environment, in such a way that it is meaningful for the child
- to use augmentative communication tailored to the individual needs of the child

In the manual it is described how space, time and activities can be structured and organized for the child and how the augmentative communication method (with concrete objects and materials) is used in an individual manner, taking into account the cognitive and visual abilities of the child and (even more important) how the child gives meaning to the world (the level of sense-making).

The supporting communication system is used in the same way in all daily living situations of the child (e.g. at home, school)

The method is developed for supporting children in the age of 4-12 years with average to below average cognitive abilities ($IQ > 70$). It is our clinical experience however that it can also be used for MDVI children and adults.

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