

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Visual figure ground and discrimination

Visual figure ground and discrimination involves being able to filter out irrelevant visual features in a busy visual environment or image. Children who struggle with visual figure ground often become overwhelmed by visual features. They often feel daunted before beginning book work, appear uncoordinated in gross and fine motor activities, and become tired quickly during fine motor tasks.



Your child will first need to learn to visually discriminate between objects in a less visually complex background. Features that make a background visually complex include:

- Colour of objects and the background e.g. black and white, red and green, or multicolour
- Number and size of objects
- Distance between objects and overlap
- Thickness of outlines
- Movement in the background
- Contrast of shapes e.g. combinations of straight lines, curves, zigzags and spirals.

Begin with fewer colours and higher contrast between colours (black and white), fewer objects, more distance between objects, thicker outlines, larger size of objects, no movement, and higher contrast of shapes.

As your child learns to master finding objects more quickly, increase the visual complexity of the background. Work towards multiple colours and less contrast between colours (shades of green), more objects, overlap between objects, thinner/dotted lines, smaller size of objects, movement in the background, and less contrast of shapes (the same shapes repeated with small differences).



Activities that develop visual figure ground and discrimination include:

- 'Find a word' games
- Picture finders e.g. 'Where's Wally?'
- 'Guess who?'
- Spot the difference
- Reading
- Puzzles
- Finding objects on felt boards

Strategies:

- If your child appears to struggle to find hidden objects encourage them to visually scan properly e.g. looking from left to right, top to bottom along the entire page of 'Where's Wally?'
- If your child continues to struggle give them clues of what the object is next to or which quadrant of the page it is in.