



Chapter 11

Helping Your Child Know Where She Is (Orientation)

Rani is a little blind girl, born in a village in India. Rani's grandmother Baka is blind too, and has been able to show Jeevan and Aruna, Rani's parents, ways to teach Rani. By the time Rani was 2 years old she had learned to feel her way along the walls and furniture. She moved slowly, carefully exploring each crack, bump, and crevice with her fingers. Now Rani's family wants to teach her to walk in the house without holding on to things.

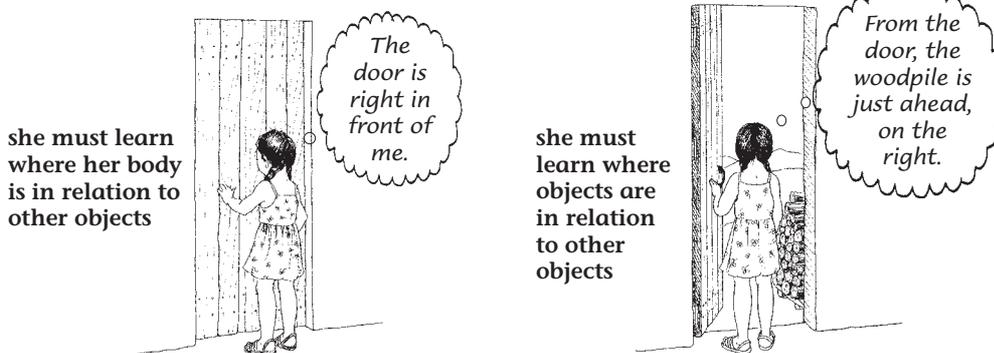


Today, Baka is explaining to Jeevan and Aruna how she learns to get from place to place. "When I want to go from the front door to my favorite chair, I walk 8 steps. That takes me past the table. Then I make a quarter-turn to the left, and I walk another 4 steps. Then I reach out my hand and make sure the chair is there, because I remember one time somebody moved the chair, and I sat down on air!" Baka laughs as she remembers.

But Baka's story is not funny. It is important for us to understand how hard it is for a blind child to learn to get around. For Rani to learn to walk without holding on, she will have to remember every detail — how many steps to walk and how far to turn. Rani's family will have to be patient because it will take Rani a lot of effort and practice.

How a child learns to know where she is

A child who can see uses her eyes to know where she is and where objects are. A child who cannot see well needs to know these things too, but she must learn to use her other senses. When she does, she will be able to move around her home and later become active in the community. To learn how to orient herself:



You can help your child learn orientation skills by: (1) teaching her about her body and the way it can move, (2) helping her develop her senses, which give important information about her surroundings, and (3) thinking about things around your home or neighborhood that she can use as landmarks.

BODY AWARENESS

A child learns the names of the parts of her body by watching and imitating other people. A child who cannot see well will learn the names of different parts of her body when you teach her to use her sense of hearing and touch. For activities that help a young baby learn about her body and develop her senses, see Chapter 5, "Activities for the Young Baby." Many of these activities are also good for older children.

► To help your child learn the names of different parts of her body

Make up games in which you ask your child to do things with different parts of her body and with your body. To give you some ideas, here are a few examples:

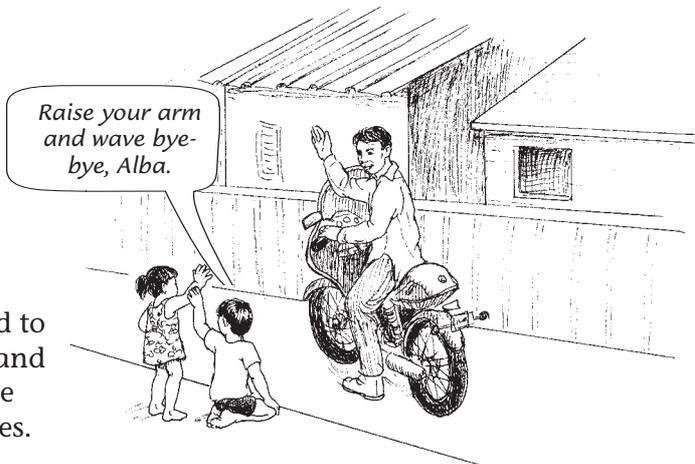
Ask your child to touch part of her body and then touch the same part on your body.



Ask your child to roll over on the floor and name each part of her body as it touches the floor. This is a good group game too.



Wrap a cloth around different parts of your child's body and ask her to take it off. Explain the name for each part of the body and what it does.



Encourage your child to nod her head, kick, and to wave — and name the body part she uses.

► **To help your child learn about the relationship between her body and other objects**

Your child needs to learn ideas like “in front of you” and “to your left” to know where things are. Here are some ways to help her learn.

Try getting her attention with a noisy toy. Tell her where the toy is — in **front**, **behind**, or on the **right** or **left** side. Then move the toy, tell her where it is, and see if she can find it herself.

Now the rattle is behind you. Can you find it?



If she has trouble knowing right from left, tie a ribbon or bracelet on one of her wrists.

Roibita, let's see how many stones you can pick up with your right hand. Then put them on your left knee.



After she can tell the right side of her body from the left side, hand her different objects and ask her to put them on one side or the other. Gradually make the games harder.

I've hidden the ball underneath the table. Let's see if you can find it.



Make up a game in which she gets **underneath** things (like a table or a bed), **on top of** things (like a bed), **in between** or **around** things (like a table and chairs), **through** things (like a door) and **inside** things (like a big box). Explain what each movement is.

First go forward, then to the left to get your ball...

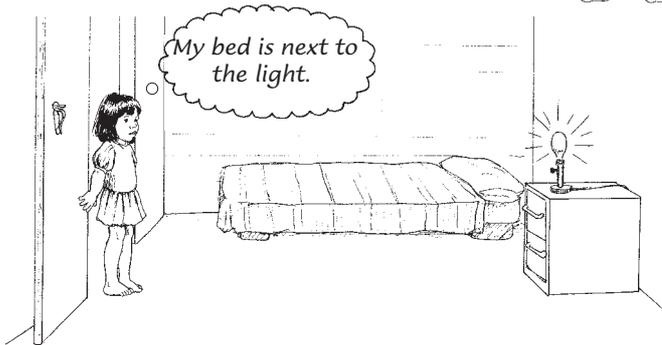
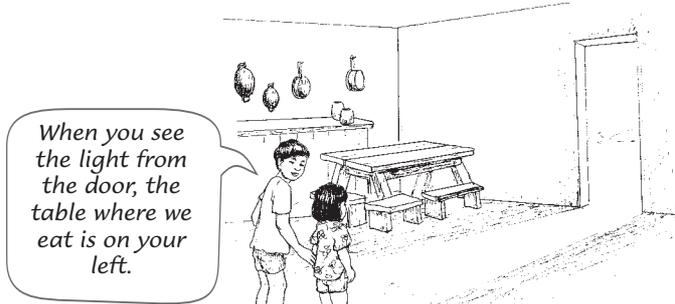


Make up different games in which she must move her body forward, backward, or sideways in order to find a toy. Explain what each movement is. If you make up a song that names each movement, she will remember them better.

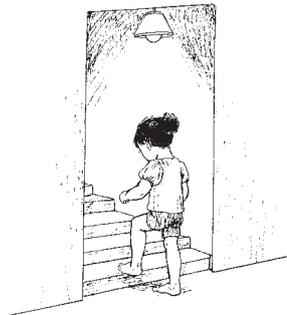
Sight

Children who can see a little can use their sight to help orient themselves, especially if you help them.

If your child can see light, give her directions using a light source as the starting point.



If your child can see light, leave a light on so she can orient herself when she comes into a room.



Put a light where the height of the floor changes or next to something your child needs to notice to move about safely.

If your child can see bright colors, put different colored cloths, tape, paint, or objects on a door and in different places outside. When she sees the color, she will know where she is.



Hearing

Hearing is especially important for a child who cannot see well because it gives her information about things that are not close by. Sounds help a blind child know what something is, where it is, and how far away it is. As often as you can, bring your child close enough to touch the object that is making the sound.

► To help your child identify and locate sounds

Play a game where your child names everyday sounds at home and in the community — like a door closing, a chair scraping against the floor, or a sewing machine.



Play a guessing game in which your child identifies family members and animals by the sounds they usually make.



You can also ask your child to move toward the sound.



Have your child listen to the sound of your footsteps as you walk toward her and then away from her. See if she can tell which way you are walking. Or clap your hands as you move closer and then farther away. Then stop and ask her to find you.



Teach your child to listen for how the sound of her footsteps (or her cane) changes when she is near a house or wall, and when there is open space. With practice, she can learn to tell how near things are by these sounds. These skills will help her when she is walking by herself in the community.



Touch and feeling

To know where she is, your child needs to learn to notice the shape, weight, and texture of objects around her. She also needs to learn to pay attention to the feel of the ground under her feet and the way temperature can change as she moves from place to place.

► To help your child develop her sense of touch

Throughout the day, encourage your child to touch objects of different sizes, weights, and textures. Ask her to describe what she feels. You can then place different objects and textures around the house to help your child know where she is.



Encourage your child to walk barefoot on different kinds of ground — for example, on dirt, grass, and gravel — so she can learn how each one feels. If she wears shoes, she can then put them on and see how the ground feels different. When she is walking outside, this information will help her know where she is or help her stay on a path.

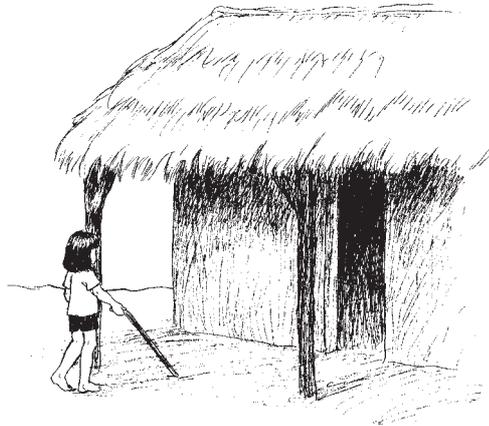




Teach your child how to use her feet to feel for differences in height, like at the edge of a road or sidewalk.

Encourage your child to notice when the temperature changes as she moves from place to place.

When Ai-Ling feels the air get cool, she knows she is almost at the door to her home.



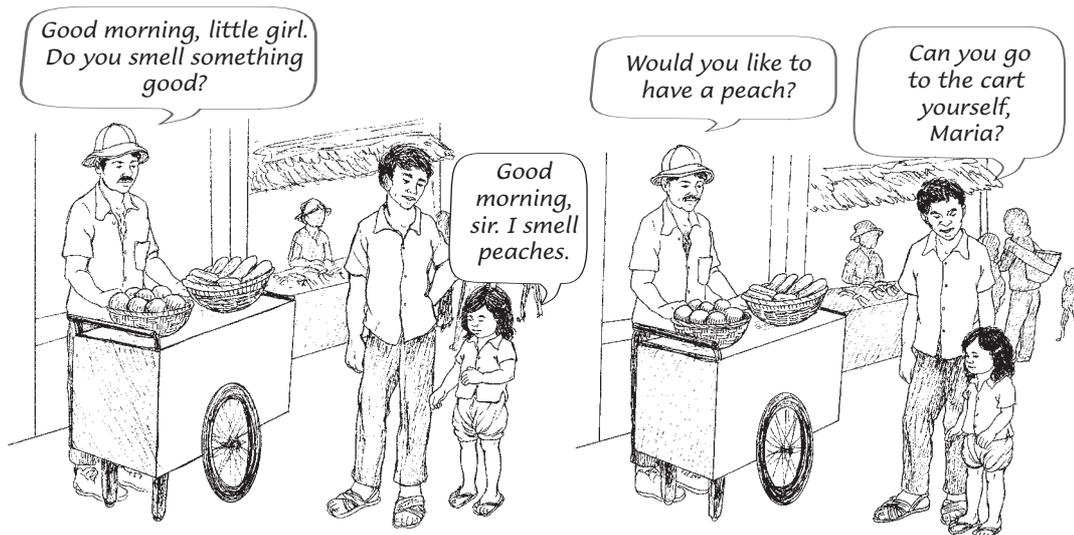
Clara knows that she should feel the sun on her back when she comes home from the market in the afternoon.

Smell

Smells, like sounds, can give information about things close by or at a distance. To understand how to use smells, your child needs to learn to identify different smells and where they come from. You can use your everyday tasks to help your child learn about smells in the community.

► To help improve your child's sense of smell

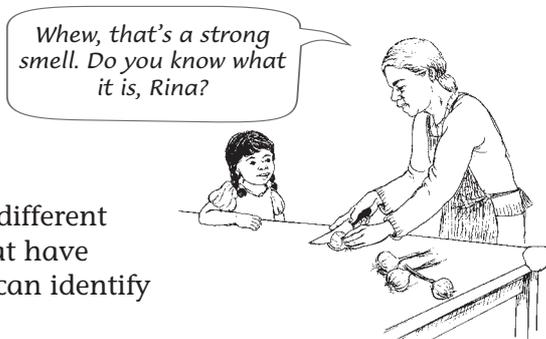
When you are walking, explain the different smells around you — for example, from food, flowers, animals, garbage. If at all possible, bring your child close enough to touch the object that she smells.



The next time you walk together, see if she can name the smells herself...

...and ask her to walk toward the smell or away from it.

Throughout the day, point out different foods and household things that have strong smells. See if your child can identify them.



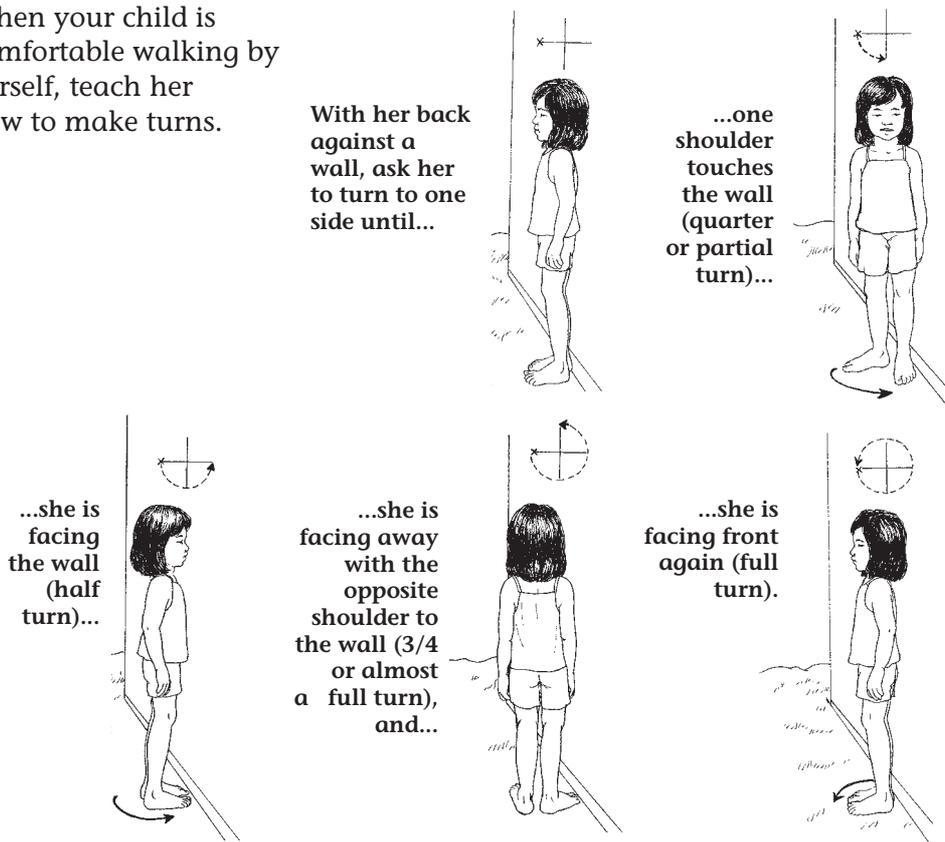
Other orientation skills

To become independent, a child needs to learn to walk in new places and to follow directions. These activities may be difficult for your child to learn and may frighten her at first. It may also be difficult for you to give directions that she can follow. You can be a better teacher for your child if you:

- try the activities with another adult first. Blindfold each other and practice all the steps. Talk about how you can make the instructions clearer.
- then try teaching a child who can see. Blindfold the child and lead her through the same steps that you tried with an adult. Pay close attention to her reactions so you can find ways to reassure and encourage her.

► To help your child follow directions

When your child is comfortable walking by herself, teach her how to make turns.



Encourage her to pay attention to how her feet move as she does this. Gradually she can move away from the wall and practice on her own. Remember to be patient. Your child will need a lot of practice before she can make turns on her own.

► **To help your child learn to walk in a new place**

These activities will help your child learn about:

- landmarks (any object, sound, or smell that is always in the same place).
- clues (objects, sounds, and smells that give good information but are not always in the same place).

These activities should be done in the order they are described here:

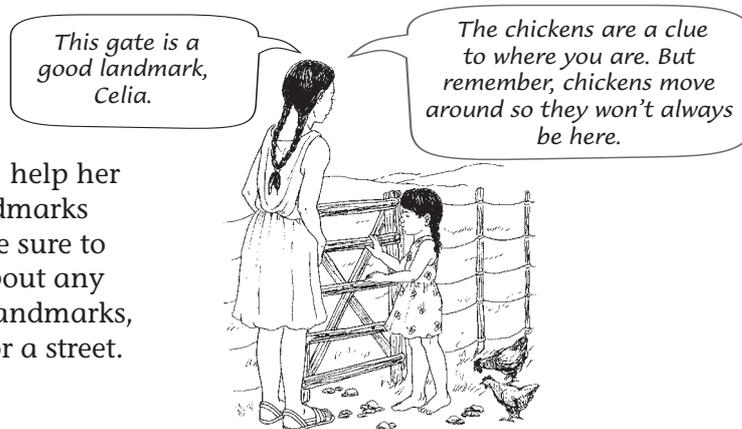
1. First, play a game in an area your child knows well. Tell her you have put some things in her path, and see if she can get past them without slipping or falling. This will help her feel more confident about trying to walk in new areas.



2. Then let her hold on to one of your fingers and walk a step behind you through a new place.



3. As you walk, help her identify landmarks and clues. Be sure to teach her about any dangerous landmarks, like a river or a street.

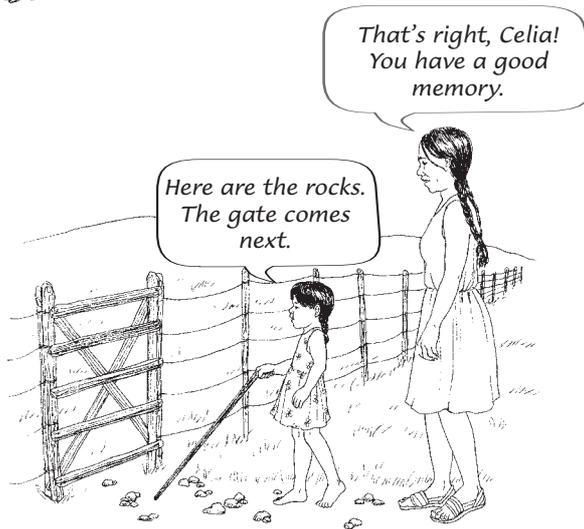




4. When she feels comfortable in that area, walk through it again — only this time walk backward, in front of her, and talk to her while you are walking.

5. Finally, walk behind her while she describes what is around her.

Be patient. It takes a long time for a child to feel comfortable walking alone in a new place.



6. When your child is confident, give her directions starting at a known landmark and explain where to go from there. Do this for very short distances at first, then gradually increase the distance.



How the community can help

People in the community can help make it easier for your child to find her way.

Community members can learn to give directions that will help her find things on her own. Chapter 13 talks about the special help community members can give to a child who cannot see well.

People can also put landmarks in places that will help your child find her way or know where to turn. Each village or neighborhood is different, so you and your community will have to decide what things are right for your child. Here are two examples of landmarks that can be community projects to help a child who cannot see well:



Putting posts or other markings where paths cross can help your child find her way.

Putting a guide rope or rail can help your child find her way.

