



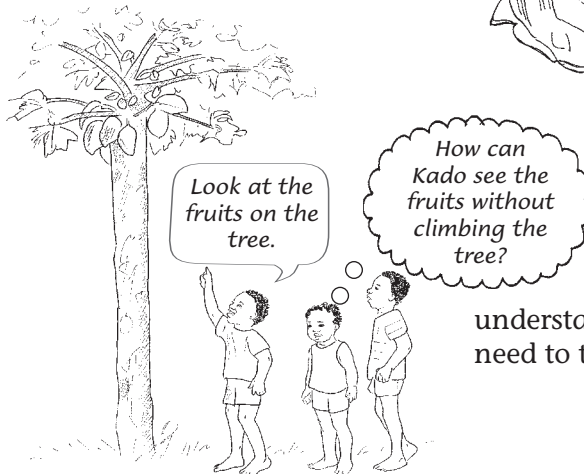
Chapter 17

As Your Child Gets Older

When your child realizes he is blind

A young child who is blind thinks that everyone learns about the world the same way he does. He is not aware that other children have different ways of knowing and learning about the world. But, as he gets older, a child who is blind begins to understand that he is different.

A young child who is blind thinks that other people look at things with their hands, too.



When a blind child is around 5 years old, he begins to understand that other children do not need to touch something to “look” at it.

As he begins to notice that he is different, he may have new, strong feelings about his difference. Some children who are blind or cannot see well feel sad about their difference. Other children are angry or frustrated.



Helping your child with his feelings

Many blind children feel upset, frustrated or sad when they notice they are blind and cannot do all the things other children can do. If you are part of a parents group, other parents may be able to tell you how they answer their children's questions. It may help you to talk about it ahead of time so you can be ready for your child's questions.



When you were a little baby, Carlos, you got very sick, and since then you haven't been able to see well.



A blind child may express his feelings by insisting that he wants to see, or by insisting that he will be able to see when he gets bigger. He may ask you why he is blind.

Essien, I am very proud of all the things you can do. And I love you very much, just the way you are.

Your child may become really angry and he may show his anger by his behavior and the way he acts with his family.

As you answer your child's questions, reassure him and praise him for all the things he can do. If he knows he is cared for and his feelings are understood, it will be easier for him to accept his blindness.



When your child talks about these feelings, tell him you understand that he is upset. Let him know that you care about the way he feels.



I know you're feeling sad because you'd like to see the fruit that Kado can see.

Balancing dependence and independence

Children like to do things that make them feel capable. A child who is old enough to notice he is blind may also notice other children his age are doing things that he would like to do, but cannot. He may feel frustrated that he is not allowed to be as independent as he wants to be.

When there is no danger, give your child as much independence as you can so he will learn to do as much as he can by himself. Like other children, your child who is blind needs to be able to take care of himself.



Even when he is grown up, your child will sometimes have to ask for help from a person who can see. Teach your child that everyone asks for help sometimes.



No thank you, Grandma. I'm a big girl. I can put my shirt on by myself.



Sometimes people offer unwanted help. Teach your child that accepting help is her choice. She can simply say "No, thank you" when she feels she can do something by herself.

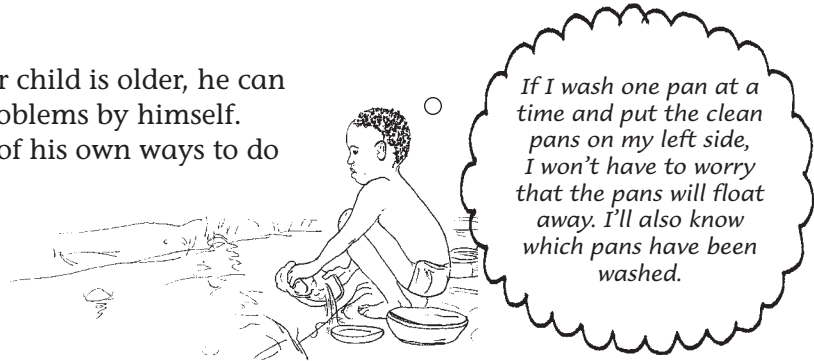
Continuing to solve problems

As your child grows older, he will find new challenges to overcome. It is important to remember that:

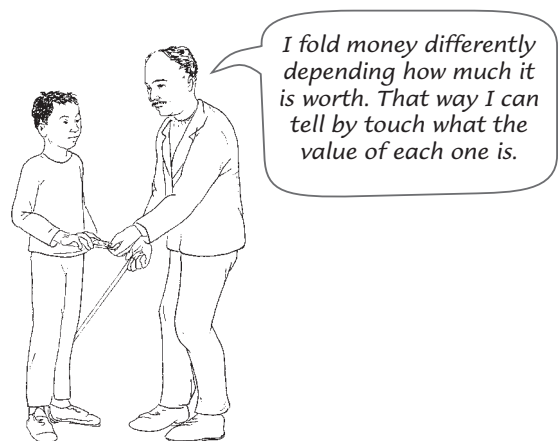
You and your child are the experts when it comes to **what works for him**. You understand his abilities and his personality. You and he have worked out ways to do things.



Now that your child is older, he can solve some problems by himself. He can think of his own ways to do things.



Other people who cannot see well have figured out lots of special ways of doing things. Your child can learn many helpful things from other people who cannot see well.



Thinking about the future

Your child may only be 5 years old now, but soon he will be a big boy, and someday he will be a grown man. You can help your child set high goals for himself. He can grow up to be an independent adult. Help him see himself as capable, and have a realistic attitude about his blindness. Blind adults learn many skills. They work, get married, have children, and are good parents.

Remember when I was Tam's age, mama? You worried so much about me. Look at me now.



Using your experience to help others

As he grows up, both you and your child will learn a lot about the different ways children who are blind can learn to do things. Sharing your experience with parents who have babies who are blind or cannot see well will be a great help to them.

I remember when Juan was Peyo's age. Here's how I helped him learn to walk...



Yes, Patia, I felt the same way when I was your age.



Your grown child may also decide to use his experience to help children who are blind or who cannot see well. It is very good for little children who are blind to spend time with adults who are also blind or cannot see well.

You may be able to work with other people to organize for better support and better services for parents of blind children. Most important, you can work to change the conditions of poverty so there will be less blindness in the future.



Your grown son or daughter may choose to work with other people to improve school programs and work opportunities for blind children and adults.

