The Neurodivergent Classroom

Cerebral visual impairment (CVI) at a Glance



CVI means the brain has difficulty processing what the eyes see. Busy, moving or cluttered scenes can be harder to make sense of than calm, simple displays.

What you may notice in class

- What they see takes a moment to register.
- Objects are hard to find on a crowded desk.
- Busy or moving images are harder to take in.
- They may not recognize faces or people right away.
- Reaching or pointing can be a little off.
- Looking away can actually help them see.
- Vision varies with light, noise and tiredness.
- Younger kids struggle with crowded materials and moving images. (elementary school)
- Older students struggle with diagrams, projected slides and room changes. (middle and high school)

Strengths

- Sees single objects well against a plain background.
- Gets around well in familiar layouts.
- Can show what they know when the format fits.
- Can tell you which displays work for them.
- Their knowledge shows through many different routes.

What helps

- Show just the one thing they need.
- Cut visual clutter, movement and busy patterns.
- Watch for glare, shadows and changing light.
- Offer a visually calm place to work.
- Use contrast on purpose and keep materials in familiar places.
- Give plenty of time to look and respond.
- Offer real objects, pictures or adjustable versions.
- Flag changes to the room, materials or layout.
- Ask what works best for this particular task.
- With younger kids, show single objects on a plain background. (elementary school)
- With older students, prepare high-contrast, uncluttered digital materials. (middle and high school)

What tends not to help

- A one-size-fits-all “CVI corner” or a fixed color recipe.
- Expecting instant responses and treating wait time as a problem.
- Handing out crowded worksheets or material packets as they are.
- Using the same adaptation for everyone without checking in.

Words that carry

“No rush. Take a good look.”

“Let’s see which way works best for you.”

“You can point, speak, type or use an object.”

“Today we’re just looking at this one thing.” (elementary school)

“Let’s clean up the page so you can see how it’s organized.” (middle and high school)

Where to find support

Perkins School for the Blind: CVI
perkins.org/what-is-cvi
US center with many free CVI resources for classroom teachers.

RNIB: CVI for education professionals
rnib.org.uk/professionals/education-professionals/cerebral-visual-impairment-and-pmld
UK sight loss charity with guidance for schools.

CVI Scotland cviscotland.org
Free information and practical tools about CVI.

Local support
Most countries have vision support services and teachers of students with visual impairments.
Ask your school or education authority.

More in the Teacher Portal: neurodivergentclassroom.com/teacher-portal/cvi/

Sources: NIH: Brain-Based Visual Impairment in Children · National Eye Institute: Cerebral visual impairment (CVI) · Royal College of Ophthalmologists: CVI · RNIB: Curriculum Framework