

Children's Vision Massachusetts Story Bank

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When Lelia was four months old, her parents and pediatrician noticed that her eyes were crossing. Upon referral to a pediatric ophthalmologist, she was prescribed an eye patch, to cover her stronger eye, and glasses. "As parents, we knew something was wrong right away when there was slight crossing. Because she is a twin we always have a direct comparison," says her mom, Rachael. When the children started becoming more aware of their surroundings, twin sister Juniper became engaged with her entire environment while Lelia was only interested in objects that were directly in front of her. Her parents had difficulty determining what Lelia could and could not see. Lelia seemed to engage with what was close by her and with only one eye. As an infant, she was prescribed eyeglasses of different strengths, but eye surgery would wait until she was two years old.

Depth perception is developed early in life. It was not long before Lelia lagged behind her twin sister in many motor skills, especially crawling. Lelia could not see the world around her well enough to engage in it. By 14 months Juniper had started walking, while Lelia crawled after her sister. At 18 months she was still more comfortable crawling. "Lelia lacked confidence in walking because she did not have good depth perception. To this day she wants to hold my hand when walking in an unfamiliar area, for example walking down the steps at the museum," explains her mom. "She has some depth perception, but missed crucial development. She is a really active child. She loves the rings and monkey bars, but with steps, she is still afraid she is going to fall."

Lelia needed a little extra help when it was time to begin kindergarten; she worried about her new surroundings in the classroom. "I gave her landmarks to find her seat," her mom said. "I would tell her things like, 'go left at the shelves, past the first table.' She does not like new situations, and I think that is in part because of her vision. I want her to trust her eyes but I also want to actively encourage her to develop her other senses and skills so that she can depend on those."

Lelia likes to accessorize in her dress so her parents and teacher reinforce how cool her glasses are. Part of getting her excited about wearing eyeglasses is allowing her to choose the frames. "Giving her a choice makes it her decision. She is always excited about her glasses and can't wait to get the new ones."

When Lelia has an eye exam, her sister has one too. "I believe that getting children's eyes checked is crucially important. We were lucky with twins since we had another child the exact same age to compare Lelia's development

to. I think it's imperative that eye screenings be available regardless of socio-economic status or insurance because vision has such a tremendous impact on a child's development. Vision affects physical activities, emotional well-being, how safe, or not, a child feels in the world, how they navigate, motor skills, even confidence in believing what they see is real, or not."

Art is a favorite pastime of Lelia's. She is very abstract in the way she draws. She will draw a blue blob and call it a tree. Her mom is not sure if this is how she sees trees or just the way she is expressing herself. "I always support her. I tell her, great tree!" Lelia loves her garden class and playing on monkey bars. She wants to become an artist when she grows up.



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Massachusetts**

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