Marsden Ball

Purpose
This exercise is designed to improve the child’s eye tracking and eye focussing skills.

Equipment
A ball about the size of a softball with letters (of varying size) or stickers on it, a balance board (or a walking rail), a stop watch.

Attach the ball to a string of about a metre in length as shown below.

Instructions

Level 1
Have the child lie on their back on the floor.

Suspend the ball on the string about two feet (60cm) above the child’s chest and slowly swing the ball whilst the child follows it with their eyes. The child’s head should remain still.

Gently swing the ball right to left, forwards to backwards, in diagonal directions, in clockwise and counter clockwise circles. Start with small movements and gradually increase the size of the circles/paths. Initially the child should follow the ball as a whole with their eyes. Try slow movements at first then increase the speed of the revolutions as the child is able to cope.

Now try to encourage the child to concentrate on the letters on the ball. Move the ball up and down such that it should move towards the child’s nose and away again. This encourages the child to follow the ball in (converge) and out (diverge). This develops eye teaming control. Emphasise to the child that they should try to keep the letters as clear as possible as the ball moves closer. When the ball moves closer the child may find that their eyes strain and as it moves further away their eyes should feel more relaxed. If the child has difficulty keeping the letters clear encourage them to look closer.

Have the child follow the ball for 30 seconds as they improve increase the amount of time by 30 seconds until the child can follow the ball for 1 minute.

Once the child can manage this have them point to the ball and feel that their arm is leading the ball i.e. smooth eye and arm movements in time with the ball’s movement are required, without actually touching the ball.

Level 2
Have the child sit comfortably on a chair. With this activity the height of the ball will be varied. Complete each activity in order,
1. Suspend the ball on the string at the child’s eye level.

2. Suspend the ball on the string 10-cm above the child’s eye level.

3. Suspend the ball on the string 30-cm below the child’s eye level.

As before slowly swing the ball whilst the child follows it with their eyes. The child’s head should remain still.

Gently swing the ball right to left, forwards to backwards, in diagonal directions, in clockwise and counter clockwise circles and finally towards and away from the child’s nose.

Try slow movements at first then increase the speed of the revolutions as the child is able to cope. Again, first have the child concentrate on the ball as a whole then encourage them to concentrate on particular letters.

Have the child follow the ball for 30 seconds as they improve increase the amount of time by 30 seconds until the child can follow the ball for 1 minute.

Once the child can manage this have them point to the ball and feel that their arm is leading the ball i.e. smooth eye and arm movements in time with the ball’s movement are required, without actually touching the ball.

**Level 3**

Repeat the above exercise with the child seated except have the child move their head in the same direction as the motion of the ball. I.e. If the ball is swung from left to right have the child move their head also from left to right whilst trying to maintain fixation on the ball. Once the child finds this effortless have them move their head in the opposite direction to the motion of the ball. This should be done with the ball at;

a. Eye level

b. 10 cm above eye level

c. 30 cm below eye level

Repeat the with and against head movements whilst the ball is swinging left to right, forwards to backwards, in clockwise and counterclockwise circles, and towards and away from the child’s nose.

Again, first have the child concentrate on the ball as a whole then encourage them to concentrate on particular letters.

Try slow movements at first then increase the speed of the revolutions as the child is able to cope.

Have the child follow the ball for 30 seconds as they improve increase the amount of time by 30 seconds until the child can follow the ball for 1 minute.

Once the child can manage this have them point to the ball and feel that their arm is leading the ball i.e. smooth eye and arm movements in time with the ball’s movement are required, without actually touching the ball.
Level 4
The child performs the activities in levels 2 & 3 whilst:

a. Standing

b. Standing on one foot alternately

c. Balancing on a balance board