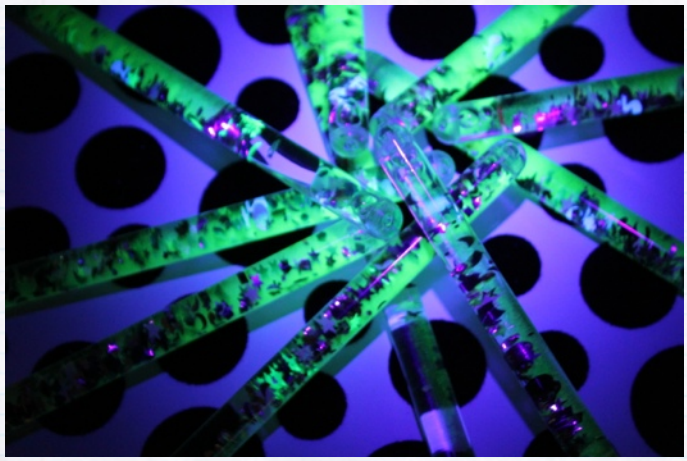
PHOTIC SEIZURES

TAKEN FROM RICHARD HIRSTWOOD'S COURSE NOTES



These notes are taken from the National Survey of Photosensitivity induced by electronic screen games and information sheets available from the National Society for Epilepsy. Hirstwood training would like to thank them for their help with this paper.

The NSE indicate that there is no evidence to suggest that flashing lights cause a photosensitive trait to develop, merely that it can trigger seizures in people harboring this trait

Photic Seizures are divided in to types one of which is described as "Those who have clinical seizures triggered by a wide range of light or patterns (e.g. the TV screen, sunlight coming through a line of tree's, flashing lights and strongly patterned decorations.)"

This then indicates that a seizure could occur when people are exposed to flashing lights in a multi sensory room. "Flickering light. The frequency of flicker stimulation, which is most likely to provoke seizures, varies from person to person. In general terms this is at approximately 5 to 30 Hz (the equivalent to 5 to 30 flashes per second) and certain strong geometric patterns are particularly powerful triggers of seizures" (some subjects will also be sensitive to frequencies outside this range). Environmental stimuli are enhanced by the closeness to the source material and its size, configuration, contrast and luminance of the stimuli. Personal factors such as age, concentration, fixation and fatigue may also contribute.

Photosensitivity is rare and will most affect children around junior and secondary school age. There are of course other seizures caused by problem solving, calculation, startle, music and reading. Emotional factors such as excitement might be potential triggers.

Only a very small proportion of people with photic induced seizures has a family history. So it is relevant that the above factors are more likely to be as enhancers in photosensitive individuals rather than act on there own. Blanket restriction should not be put on people with epilepsy. The majority are not photosensitive and wherever possible should be allowed to lead as normal life as possible without further stigma, isolation or disadvantage.

In the Multi Sensory Room it could therefore be wrong to say that if a adult or child is known to have a history of seizures, they must not go into the room. Seizures can be caused by many stimuli; the visual effects may not be the cause.

For more information about seizures and specialist help contact the The Chalfont Centre for Epilepsy, Chalfont Saint Peter, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, SL9 0RJ Tel 01494 601300 The web site for the National Society for Epilepsy is extensive and offers a lot more information than we can put in this page. http://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk