

The Eye Doctor

Better Vision = Better Grades

How Undetected Vision Problems May Lower Your Child's Grades

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If your child is experiencing lower grades than you would like, an undetected vision problem may be the cause. Your child may have been checked for 20/20 eyesight at school, but most school screenings do not evaluate the visual skills that are necessary for reading. The vital visual skills are tracking, (moving the eyes smoothly and accurately along a line of print), focusing and eye teaming (using both eyes together as a team). If these basic visual skills are not fully developed in your child, they will hinder your child's ability to perform up to his or her potential level. The result is often lower grades.

How Do I know What Problems to Look For?

Have your child read aloud. Do not correct your child during this process and simply observe his or her performance. The following list includes the symptoms that indicate skill deficits. (All of these problems may be caused by poor tracking, focusing and eye-teaming.)

- Does your child frequently lose his place while reading, skip lines or reread lines of print?
- Does your child leave out small words or add words or letters that were not actually there?
- Does your child move his head during reading, use his finger as a marker to read or display a short attention span while reading?
- Does your child ever complain of watery eyes, blurry vision or headaches during or after reading?
- Does your child have trouble copying accurately from the chalkboard or from a book?
- Does your child repeat letters within words, misalign digits in number columns, squint, close or cover one eye while reading?

All of these symptoms may be caused by a lack of adequate visual skills. It is important to remember that these problems are not caused by your child being lazy or not concentrating. Watery eyes, blurry vision, headaches and a short attention span are often caused because your child *is* trying very hard, but his or her lack of visual skills may cause these symptoms of discomfort. Improving these visual skills will often help your child develop his/her full intellectual potential in school.

What if My Child Has 20/20 Eyesight and Still is Not Reading Well?

In a typical school visual screening, your child is asked to read very small letters on a chart 20 feet away. 20/20 sight simply means that a letter 8 millimeters high can be seen clearly at a distance of twenty feet. However, reading demands that your child focus at a close working distance, usually 14-16 inches, point his eyes in toward the print and then track along closely spaced lines of print. This task is entirely different from looking at a wall chart across the room one eye at a time. The visual skills needed for reading *are not* adequately evaluated in a typical school screening.

When your child has difficulty learning to read or strongly resists assigned reading, it may be because he or she has not developed the necessary visual skills. Tracking is the ability to move the eyes smoothly and accurately along a line of print. Focusing is the ability to keep the words clearly in focus as the eyes move. Eye teaming must be maintained with the eyes moving so the child does not see double. These skills can all be taught to your child.

How Do These Poorly Developed Visual Skills Actually Affect My Child in School?

If your child cannot track accurately and smoothly, he/she will often lose his/her place while reading. He/she may frequently skip or repeat lines of print. These problems destroy your child's ability to comprehend the meaning of words. Tracking problems also lead to poor attention span. Who can keep his/her attention on jumbled words?

If your child has trouble accurately focusing, he/she may complain of blur while reading. If he/she has trouble maintaining his/her focusing, he/she may begin reading with no problems but experience great difficulty within 10-15 minutes. If he/she has trouble sustaining his/her focusing, he/she will have a lot of trouble with long tests that demand high levels of focusing for sustained periods. Focusing problems can cause significant problems with attention span. He/she cannot think about something he/she cannot stay visually focused on.

If your child has trouble with eye-teaming, he/she may complain of blur or seeing double while reading. It is a complex skill to maintain both eyes accurately on a word while the eyes are sweeping along a line of print. Failure to keep both eyes aimed at exactly the same place will also cause fatigue and attention span problems. Can you imagine how difficult it would be to read if each eye was aiming at a different word?

Children with visual skill problems often do not like to read, but they may love to be read to. This can be another sign of a vision skill deficit.

If your child lacks the visual skills necessary for reading, how can we expect him to comprehend what he is reading? How can we expect him to sit still and read for long periods of time? Five to ten minutes may be a very long time for a child who has problems with the mechanics of taking in the information. Reading is a combination of the mechanical skills of tracking, focusing and eye teaming and the perceptual skills needed for understanding. After the information is taken in accurately and efficiently, he/she then needs to interpret the information. This understanding occurs with the skill of perception. When you consider the fact that 80% of all classroom instruction is involved with visual information, it is easy to see the importance of the visual skills mentioned above. Inability to take in visual information will doom your child to mediocre academic performance and not allow him or her to perform up to his or her potential.

There is hope, however. Your child can easily learn the mechanical skills necessary for reading at home.

How Can I Improve My Child's Reading Skills At Home?

There is a series of easy and fun exercises that you can do with your child at home to help them read better. Before you begin the visual skills exercises at home, be sure and take your child to the Optometrist for a complete eye exam. It is possible that your child needs corrective lenses first.

Once you have had your child's eyes evaluated, you may begin the vision exercises. With 3 to 15 minutes of practice a day, you can watch your child begin to develop better tracking, focusing and eye teaming. As his skills improve, teachers will comment on improved attention span, better ability to read without skipping lines and words, better comprehension, better handwriting, more accurate copying from the board, and best of all - higher self-esteem. You can remove a major stumbling block so that your child will be more able to express his or her ability and perform up to his/her potential.

Where Can I Obtain The Exercises to Improve My Child's Visual Skills?

The *I Read I Succeed Vision Therapy Kit* took over three years to develop and has hundreds of fun and easy-to-do eye exercises with your child. You may also want to share these exercises that you can do with your child's teacher.

For more great information about Vision Therapy and Raising Reading Comprehension, visit: www.Howtolearn.com/IReadISucceed.html

About the Authors

Greg Gilman, O.D., D.O.S., F.OCVD is a graduate of Southern California College of Optometry and an Optometric Extension Program Foundation Knight-Henry Memorial Award winner. He has written two books on vision and lectured in over 25 countries on improving children's vision skills. He is active in the College of Optometrists in Vision Development.

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Drs. Greg and Beth Gilman have lectured extensively in the United States, Europe, Africa and Asia on the visual aspects of reading and school performance. They have together authored the A+ Vision Manual. They have received numerous national and international awards for their work in the area of vision. This is their second book. They have taught at academic institutions and published research in the area of vision and learning. They have taught the concepts and practice of vision therapy to optometry students, teachers and doctors throughout the world.