



Is It Really ADD/ADHD... Or Could It Be A Visual Problem?

Dr. Christina M. Danley

ADD / ADHD Support Group

CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) is the nation's leading Membership, non-profit organization serving individuals with AD/HD and their families offering support for individuals, parents, teachers, professionals, and others.
www.CHADD.org

Developmental Optometrist / Vision Therapy

**The Center for Vision Development
Christina M. Danley, O.D.**
128 Holiday Court, Suite 126
Franklin, TN 37067 (615) 791-5766
www.center4vision.com
Specializing in the assessment and treatment of children and adolescents for vision problems that interfere with reading, learning, memory, attention, and learning-related vision problems similar to those with ADD/ADHD. View: Eyesight & Vision Problems: ADD/ADHD at the website. Free phone consultations offered.

Psychologist Speech & Occupational Therapy

**Word of Mouth
Speech and Learning Associates**
217 Jamestown Park Road, Suite 9
Brentwood, TN 37027 615-376-3045
wordofmouthsla.com
Word of Mouth is a multi-disciplinary private practice serving children from birth through high school. Our clinical psychologist, speech-language pathologist, and occupational therapist each have nearly 25 years of experience assessing and treating children with developmental and learning challenges including AD/HD, Language Processing Disorders, and Fine/Visual Motor Delays. They are a team of dedicated professionals who are committed to providing high quality, family-centered, and collaborative services that will assist children in reaching their full potential.

Sometimes vision problems can be misdiagnosed as Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD). Other times, vision problems can worsen the symptoms of ADD/ADHD by contributing to difficulty with reading and paying attention. Understanding this is crucial for a correct diagnosis.

If you are like most people, you assume that if someone can see the letters on the eye chart or has passed a vision screening, then their vision is fine. Many think that "20/20" means your vision is perfect. This is a very common misconception that can cause years of struggling. There are actually 17 visual skills that are necessary for academic success. Seeing the letters on the eye chart is only one of them. When one or more are missing, paying attention while reading becomes difficult.

You may be interested to know that symptoms of ADD/ADHD can be quite similar to those of vision problems that interfere with reading and learning. Some of the symptoms of a learning-related vision problem include difficulty paying attention to details, being easily distracted, having difficulty finishing schoolwork, fidgeting and squirming when seated, and running and climbing excessively.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and the standard used to diagnose ADD/ADHD, the symptoms of ADD/ADHD must be present in two or more settings, such as school and home, in order to make a diagnosis. But if a child is having difficulty paying attention because he can't make the words clear or keep them from moving, the setting won't matter. He will have attention problems wherever he is.

An easy way for parents to tell if their child may have a vision problem contributing to their attention difficulties is to consider how long their child pays attention when read to. If a school-aged child can process auditory information with no problem, but has difficulty attending when the information is presented visually, then it is likely that this child may be missing one or more of the visual skills required for reading and learning.

When you have a child who has difficulty concentrating in school or at home, especially when it comes to reading or writing assignments, it is vital that you rule out the possibility that a vision problem may be contributing to your child's difficulties before you assume that it's ADD/ADHD.

Parents often brag when their child can see 20/20. But what parents don't realize is that while a child can see clearly far away, that does not automatically mean that their child can see clearly at the distance required for reading. For instance, a child who is farsighted, meaning that they can see the classroom chalkboard clearly but have difficulty seeing at reading distance, will usually pass the vision screening by the school nurse or the pediatrician. Keep in mind that a vision screening is just that: a screening.

Most vision screenings test for less than half of the 17 visual skills required for reading and learning. However, many parents think that their child had a full eye exam at school or the pediatrician's office when in fact they just had a screening. A full eye exam is necessary to determine if vision problems are contributing to attention difficulties.

Not all eye doctors test for learning-related vision problems. A developmental optometrist provides the specialized testing required to detect vision problems of this nature. So it is important for parents to ask their eye doctor the right questions. When you call your eye doctor's office, ask the following two questions:

1. Do you test for learning-related vision problems?
2. Do you provide an in-office vision therapy program when indicated, or will you refer me to someone who does?

If the answer is no to one or both of these questions, visit COVD's website, www.covd.org, to find a developmental optometrist near you.

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