

Achievement Tests and Your Child's Eyes

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Working with a child who is having difficulty with reading and learning can be initially challenging. Yet, with each failure it becomes more and more frustrating, and emotionally draining.

While you may be able to help your child learn, when it comes to standardized tests it becomes more challenging. Fortunately, there is hope. Over 60% of children who struggle with reading and learning have vision problems which are typically 100% correctable, yet when undetected, these children continue to struggle with reading and perform poorly on standardized tests.

Often these children are very bright and could easily be considered auditory learners because they are excellent listeners. Vision problems that are not diagnosed can make it difficult for a child to make sense out of what they are reading, causing what appear to be attention problems, learning difficulties and poor performance on written tests.

Having 20/20 eyesight merely means you can see a certain size letter at a distance of 20 feet, whereas vision is a complex process that involves over 15 visual skills which are critical to academic success. One in four children have an undiagnosed vision problem which can interfere with learning and lead to academic problems, behavioral problems, or worse. It is important to know that these children rarely report symptoms because they think everyone sees the same way that they do.

If your child struggles with reading,

please ask yourself the following questions. Does your child: Omit or substitute small words (like "of" for "for", or "if" for "of," etc.)? Get frustrated when trying to read? Take much longer doing his/her homework than it should? Have trouble making out words? Slow when copying or make lots of errors? Find it harder to read at the end of the day than in the morning? Skip words or repeat lines when reading out loud to you? Reverse letters like b's into d's when reading? Have a short attention span with schoolwork? Even one of these symptoms could signal a possible vision problem.

Often a child will be missing the visual skills critical for reading and learning because he hasn't had a chance to develop

them. For children 7 years old and older, a variety of toys and games can help them develop these vital visual skills. For example: riding a bicycle; jump ropes; pogo sticks; roller skates; different size and shape balls; target games; more sophisticated building toys; puzzles; remote-controlled toys; timed shape/size sorting games; plastic disks for tossing between players.

If your child can read fine for a short period of time, but then starts

having trouble recognizing words which were easily read before, try enlarging the print and see if that helps. You can also provide visual breaks when she starts to have trouble by having her go outside and play catch, or just go for a walk and look at the trees. Then when you go back to reading, see if she can read the paragraph she previously struggled with.

Routine eye exams are not designed to test for all the visual skills required for reading and learning. You need to tell

your eye doctor that you are concerned about academic performance and share the symptoms you are observing. Ideally, if you can, it is best to bring your child to a developmental optometrist who provides specialized testing and treatment for vision-based learning problems.

Ask your eye doctor if she tests for the following: eye movement control, focusing near to far, sustaining clear focus, eye teaming ability, depth perception, visual motor integration, form perception, visual memory and visual perceptual skills; and, if a problem is found, will she refer to an optometrist who provides vision therapy?

Research published in the Journal of Learning Disabilities, revealed that sixth graders with below-average reading skills improved their test scores by up to two grade levels after vision therapy.

A three-year study of 540 children found that children who struggled with visual perceptual and eye movement abilities did poorly on standardized tests. Parents and educators often assume that if a child passes a vision screening, that there is no vision problem. Unfortunately, this is often incorrect.

As educators, it is important for homeschooling parents to learn about the vital role that vision plays in a child's ability to read and learn, especially if your bright child's performance scores on achievement tests don't match the verbal scores.

For a more complete symptom checklist you can visit the website for the College of Optometrists in Vision Development, www.visionforlearning.org, and click on "Parents" on the menu bar on the left.

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