

VISION BASED LEARNING PROBLEMS: THE ROLE OF THE OPTOMETRIST ON THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM

When a child is not achieving to his or her potential at school, parents and teachers need to voice their concerns and take action. This action may follow any number of courses, including parent-teacher conferences, educational, behavioral, and medical assessments, and tutoring or special education services.

Children having difficulty learning may be evaluated by a multi-disciplinary team of school personnel. This team is often comprised of a school psychologist, a learning specialist, and a reading specialist. With the parents' consent, the outcome of these evaluations result in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This sets the goals to be achieved by the child through special education.

Any assessment of a child who is experiencing reading or learning problems should also include a comprehensive vision evaluation by a developmental optometrist. The role of the developmental optometrist in this multi-disciplinary approach is to assess the child's visual abilities. Attempting to function in school with poor visual abilities may result in fatigue, short attention span, avoidance of near work, slower performance, and reversals or transpositions. Deficient eye-hand coordination can result in sloppy or tedious handwriting which will interfere with a child's ability to express thoughts in writing.

Tests administered at school or visual screenings conducted by school nurses are useful in identifying the need for comprehensive visual evaluations. However, they are not intended to substitute for optometric assessment of visual efficiency or visual information processing skills. The results of any prior assessments, together with the child's history and the results of the optometric evaluation should be thoroughly reviewed when making recommendations for treatment and special education services.

Many children with learning difficulties may have 20/20 eyesight, but still have other vision problems. Recommendations for treatment of vision based learning problems are to enable the child to use their vision more efficiently and process visual information effectively. This may be accomplished through the application of lenses, prisms and/or vision therapy. When visual function is improved, children are better able to benefit from classroom instruction or specialized resources.

Members of the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) are optometrists whose special interests, experience and training enable them to examine children with vision based learning problems. Fellows of COVD are board certified in developmental vision including the diagnosis and management of learning-related visual problems. For further information, contact COVD or consult with an optometrist who is a member of COVD.

This informational paper was produced by the College of Optometrists in Vision Development, which board certifies qualified optometric physicians in vision therapy. For further information, see our website, www.covd.org. WP10 Rev 1/2/08 ©2008

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