

Guidelines for Identifying Visual Perceptual Problems in School-Age Children

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We use our sense of sight to help us function in the world around us. It helps us figure out if something is near or far away, safe or threatening. *Eyesight*, also known as *visual perception*, refers to our ability to accurately identify and locate objects in our environment. Visual perception is an important component of vision that contributes to the way we see and interpret the world.



What Is Visual Perception?

Visual perception is our ability to process and organize visual information from the environment. This requires the integration of all of the body's *sensory experiences* including *sight, sound, touch, smell, balance, and movement*. Most children are able to integrate these senses by the time they start school. This is important because approximately 75% of all classroom learning is visual. A child with even mild visual-perceptual difficulties will struggle with learning in the classroom and often in other areas of life.

How Are Visual Perceptual Problems Diagnosed?

A child with visual perceptual problems may be diagnosed with a *visual processing disorder*. He/she may be able to easily read an eye chart (*acuity*) but have difficulty organizing and making sense of visual information. In fact, many children with visual processing disorders have good acuity (i.e., 20/20 vision).

A child with a visual-processing disorder may demonstrate difficulty discriminating between certain letters or numbers, putting together age-appropriate puzzles, or finding matching socks in a drawer.

What are Some Signs of Visual Problems?

A child with visual problems may:

- Tire easily.
- Squint, rub, or have watery eyes while reading/writing/copying from the board.
- Lose his/her place when reading.
- Complain of double vision and headaches.
- Have crossed or drifting eyes past six months of age.
- Have difficulty moving eyes together or individually.
- Omit, substitute, repeat, or confuse similar words.



- Have difficulty with sizing, spacing, or copying written words.
- Confuse left/right directions.
- Have poor posture during writing/reading assignments
- Have eye-hand coordination problems (e.g., shoe tying, buttons, participating in sports activities).



If you observe one or more of the symptoms above, make an appointment with a behavioral optometrist who has specialized training in assessing and treating children with visual perception problems. Ninety percent of individuals who have difficulties with their visual skills are never diagnosed! The optometrist conducts an evaluation to figure out whether glasses, vision therapy, and/or an occupational therapy referral are necessary.

How Can the Classroom Be Improved for a Child with Visual Problems?

It is easy to make classroom accommodations for children with visual problems!

- Have the child sit close to the chalkboard so it is easier to copy assignments.
- Have the child use a slant board or 3-ring binder to increase visual attention and good posture during writing tasks.
- Have the child use a guide to help keep his/her place while reading and when spacing between words while writing.
- Have a child use highlighted paper and color-coded boundary lines to increase spatial awareness during handwriting activities.

Resources

Hickman, L., & Hutchins, R. (2004) *Seeing clearly: Fun activities for improving visual skills*. Las Vegas: Sensory Resources.

Erhardt, R.P & Duckman, R.H. (2005). Visual-perceptual-motor dysfunction and its effects on eye-hand coordination and skill development (171-177). *Functional Visual Behavior in Children: An Occupational Guide to Evaluation and Treatment Options* (2nd Ed.) American Occupational Therapy Association.



Helpful Products

Here are some Super Duper® products that may be helpful for children with a visual-processing disorder. Visit www.superduperinc.com or call 1-800-277-8737. Click the links below to see the product and description.

Webber® Handwriting Paper

Ask for Item #OTS-403 http://www.superduperinc.com/O_Pages/ots403.HTM

Webber® Slant Board and Binder

Ask for Item #OTS-225 http://www.superduperinc.com/O_Pages/ots225.HTM

ManipuLinks™

Ask for Item #OTS-227 http://www.superduperinc.com/O_Pages/ots227.HTM