

WHAT IS VISION

What is vision and how does it differ from basic eyesight? Eyesight is the ability to see something clearly and is generally talked about in terms of 20/20, 20/400 etc notations. Vision, however, goes beyond eyesight. Vision involves the ability to process and interpret incoming visual information.

It is important to know that vision is a learned process that is trainable. Unlike learning to walk and talk, where a child can imitate his parents or the cartoon character he watches on t.v.; vision is something that cannot be imitated. It is as unique as a fingerprint because no two people see and interpret the world the same way.

As a result, it is impossible for a parent to understand what a child sees and how he interprets his world. Further, children assume that all people see things the same way and therefore, might not complain about problems that affect their ability to succeed in school. Since 80% of all information learned comes to him via the visual pathways, any interference in those pathways will inhibit a child's ability to achieve their potential.

As a child progresses throughout school, the level of demand on his visual skills increases. Below is a list of some of those crucial skills.

- Tracking and Saccades- Includes scanning from letter to letter or word to word, looking ahead and predicting text, smoothly following from one line to the next.
- Binocular Coordination- The ability to coordinate the movement of the two eyes together, sometimes called teaming.
- Convergence- During reading, the eyes must turn inward to aim at the material they must see and interpret.
- Eye-Hand Coordination and Visual-Motor skills- Problems in this area will cause children a host of trouble and most often exhibits in unusual postural adaptations, closing or covering an eye, and difficulty with coordination in sports.
- Visual Memory- Required for word recognition and copying tasks, such as in reading and writing.
- Short Term Visual Memory- The ability to recall information presented quickly.
- Visual Discrimination- Recognizing subtle visual differences, as in between letters (b/d) and words (was/saw).
- Focusing Skills- The ability to maintain clear focus at a particular spot on a page and to rapidly change focus from one distance to another (copying from board to paper).
- Directionality- The visual reflex to read from left to right.
- Form Perception- If a child can't copy basic geometric shapes or recognize them, he will have difficulty perceiving a series of lines that make up letters, which turn into words that make up sentences.
- Span of Perception- The ability to see groups of information. Many children only see one word at a time or parts of a word.
- Visualization- Being able to recall words learned or obtaining a mental picture of information.

Have you ever seen a child who seems to guess at a word? Usually the child will see only the beginning letters of a word and will then guess the rest. This can be related to tracking and saccades, binocular coordination, convergence, and span perception.

Do you know a child that knows letters and words but can't seem to put them on paper? Visual skills include input and interpretation, and many children are unable to utilize all the knowledge they have to put their thoughts down on paper.

Have you ever noticed a child with poor posture when reading or writing? This child may have difficulty with many skills, and the postural adaptations enable the child to suppress or inhibit their weaker eye.

How often have you seen a child reverse letters? This problem generally exists in younger children and should not persist past 7 years of age.

Do you ever feel that a child fails to recognize a word they just learned? They may have trouble with visualization, visual memory skills, among other skills.

Studies show that the greater the amount of effort involved in reading, the lower comprehension and reading performance will exist. So it isn't unusual that a child may have poor visual attention and instead of reading or doing near work, may spend a lot of time staring out the window. He may lose his place when reading and use a bookmark or finger to maintain his place, omit or confuse small words, and be labeled dyslexic, learning disabled, or ADD.

The good news is that all of these skills can be trained and improved to allow children to realize their potential. Vision therapy, is a set of activities that work to enhance and in some cases, train visual skills that are deficient.