

## **Vision Therapy**

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### **What is Vision Therapy?**

As a former teacher and now an optometrist I want to share with you what I have learned about vision. Many educators, parents and students think vision and eyesight are the same. **THEY ARE NOT THE SAME.** Vision involves everything that allows you to understand what it is you see. Vision allows you to know and understand where you are in space. It allows you to know and understand where something else is in space. Vision works with the balance system of the inner ear. Vision allows you to see or imagine a person, object or scene and tell someone else about it through language.

Vision is composed of skills that allow you to gather information and process information. We gather information through tracking it, seeing it single with two eyes, and focusing the lens in the eye to see it clear. Once information is gathered it is processed. We process information through acquired visual perceptual skills i.e. visual discrimination, visual memory, etc. and visual motor skills (eye-hand coordination skills).

Vision is also composed of a central system and peripheral system that allows us to see detail at the same time that we can be aware of objects in our peripheral vision.

Concerning eyesight, it is your ability to distinguish a certain size letter (known as a 20/20 letter) at 20 feet. That is all.

### **Use of the visual systems**

The visual system was designed for hunting, fishing, farming and locating danger. Note, these are all distance activities. In our developed society the visual system is "parked" at near for computers, reading, test taking, etc. So we are taking a system meant to work at distance and using it at near for longer and longer periods of time. Many times the visual system will experience stress or strain while doing these intense near point activities. The visual system often finds ways to adapt to this stress. Ways of adaptations are:

- Becoming nearsighted
- Avoid near activities like reading, homework, etc.
- Developing vision problems like convergence problems, focusing problems
- Developing astigmatism

The use of lenses and or vision therapy can make working at nearpoint easier and more comfortable so that vision does not interfere with learning.

## **Vision is not a given**

Vision is learned and earned. The visual system at birth is like a blank slate that is written upon by interaction with the environment. Children are not born with the ability to draw triangles, but with time and interaction with their environment they will some day will be able to do so. So if a child is having a tracking problem, a focusing problem, a convergence (eye teaming problem causing double vision) a perceptual problem vision therapy can teach and train the visual system these abilities so that learning is made easier.

If you child is:

- Experiencing difficulty in school
- Not performing academically to potential
- Dropping in school performance
- Covering an eye to read
- Losing their place when reading
- Having difficulty completing reading or writing assignments
- Complains of headaches associated with reading, writing or seat work
- Pulls work closer than 14-16 inches in order to read
- Having difficulty copying from board to book or book to page
- Squinting to see clearly at distance or near
- Reversing numbers or letters after age 7 1/2
- Rubbing eyes
- Short attention span
- Uses finger to read

Your child may have a LEARNING RELATEDVISION problem that is interfering with learning.

Vision Therapy can train the visual system to track, focus, use the two eyes to work together as one, to coordinate the hand with the brain and the eye, to discriminate the differences between to similar objects but yet are different, to remember items in sequence and train vision to work with the whole body.

Because vision and vision skills needed for learning are earned and learned they can be trained. Getting the visual system trained can make learning easier and more productive. Trying to learn without a good visual system is like trying to drive a car without a good engine. The good news is once visual skills are learned for the most part they never have to be re-learned. Many students struggle in school because of an undiagnosed but very

treatable vision problem. As one parent put it to me, "Vision Therapy is an investment in my child's learning and education."

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