



Teenage Life

Visual difficulties

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Visual difficulties are complex and if your child has difficulties with reading and writing, there could be many reasons for this. Identifying visual difficulties in young people with autism is also tricky as they may not think to report differences they experience as abnormal. They may also be unable to cope with the sensory or social side of visual tests. Not all opticians will have the experience and knowledge of how to look for more complex vision issues.

It may be useful to use the checklist below, and if your child has a few of the following problems, talk to your optician or behavioural optometrist. You can find out where your local specialists are by checking on the British Association of Behavioural Optometrist's (BABO) website <http://babo.co.uk/find-a-behavioural-optometrist/>

The following checklist will get you thinking about any potential visual difficulties your child may have; it is not a definitive list of possible symptoms.

Your child may not have described these symptoms before, because they think they are normal. You may need to ask a few questions and watch and observe how they use their eyes.

Even if your child does show some of these symptoms, it may just be a temporary effect eg they are easily distracted or just tired. Sometimes there can be deeper causes when children have problems such as:

- Words move about or blur when reading
- Leaning in for writing or holding things close when reading
- Getting headaches, blinking a lot or experiencing aching eyes
- Difficulty copying from a whiteboard or book
- Loss of concentration or poor attention span
- Lower than average reading accuracy and a reading speed below their age
- Missing out words, letters or lines when reading

- Often uses a finger as a marker to keep place
- Reversing letters or numbers
- Moving their head or covering one eye when reading.

The whole field of visual problems is quite complex and we are still finding out about what works best for which child. If you are in any doubt it is worth asking further questions starting with an optometrist who is an accredited member of the British Association of Behavioural Optometrists.

There are debates about what the different types of visual difficulty are called and what they mean but many issues come under the heading of visual stress or pattern glare.

You may also hear of terms such as Irlen syndrome, visual dyslexia and scotopic sensitivity.

Your specialist optometrist will carry out tests to find out the difficulties that cause your child's sight problems. Each child is individual so there are lots of different ways to test vision which some specialist optometrists will be able to use.

One method of helping some children is through the use of coloured lenses, overlays and coloured reading rulers. These colours don't help everyone, but sometimes the results can be quite dramatic. Coloured lenses are thought to reduce pattern glare from traditional black print on white paper. However, before using them, it's worth consulting an eye care professional such as a specialist optometrist, and asking for a binocular vision assessment to check for other underlying causes of visual difficulties.

Be aware that this is an area where there are disagreements between different professionals about what 'works' and why. But it is an area worth investigating if your son or daughter experiences visual difficulties.

Visual Specialists

British Association of Behavioural Optometrists

www.babo.co.uk

07443 569021 or admin@babo.co.uk

Institute of Optometry (Specific Learning Difficulties Clinic)

www.ioo.org.uk

020 7407 4183 or admin@ioo.org.uk

The Irlen Institute (Information site re the Irlen Method)

www.irlen.com or www.irlenuk.com