When a Child Struggles to Learn..... Information for Educators

Put simply, no matter how good the quality of the education, no matter what the teaching approach is, if the child can't keep the work single and clear, if the they can't move their eyes from place to place accurately and efficiently, the will not perform up to their potential in school.

If a child has difficulties with learning, chances are they may also have a vision problem. It's important to understand that there is more to good vision than seeing the board clearly, or having "20/20" sight. How the brain and eyes work together has a tremendous impact on the learning process for both children and adults.

But first, some quick facts:

- **4 out of 5** children with reading difficulties also have a vision problem.
- **1 in 5** children have a vision problem that impacts on efficient learning.
- Many of these vision problems are related to focussing & eye teaming. These conditions can be easily & quickly alleviated with Office Based Vision Therapy &/or glasses.
- Some vision problems don't occur until after 7 years old when the child has begun to read for comprehension.
- Many of the symptoms of common vision problems are identical to the symptoms used to diagnose dyslexia and ADHD**.** Many children are labeled "laz**y",** further adding to reduced self-esteem, frustration and issues with confidence.
- Undetected vision problems persist into adult-hood affecting a person's quality of life and ability to function at their best for study or work and may even influence career choices and earning potential.

Harmony Vision Care can assist educators in the following ways:

1. Assess children who are not achieving to potential and treat underlying functional vision problems.
2. Provide an understanding of the role of vision in learning through our website, handouts and presentations for teachers.
3. Provide to schools, a vision screening service that is designed to detect functional vision problems and not just issues with sight.

The Link between Vision, Reading & Learning

The great confusion for parents and teachers is that they are often told that visual readiness has little to do with reading or learning. Reading is a complex process that is still barely understood by the world's best scientists. While many deficits are associated with difficulties, a "cause" is yet to be found and it is quite likely that it is a combination of factors that ultimately result in failure to learn at the same pace as others.

This information is intended as a guide to teachers and educators by Harmony Vision Care Pty Ltd.
Please contact our practice for more detailed information.
Harmony Vision Care
Shop 20a, 221 Christine Ave, Varsity Lakes Q 4227
p: +6175520 5900 e: info@harmonyvisioncare.com.au
www.harmonyvisioncare.com.au

Despite research not definitively knowing the "causes", it is safe to say that good vision does have an important role in a child's education. Put simply, no matter how good the quality of the education, no matter what the teaching approach is, if the child can't keep the work single and clear, if the they can't move their eyes from place to place accurately and efficiently, the will not perform up to their potential in school.

When vision does not work well it interferes with the best efforts of the child, the parent and the educator. Treating vision problems allows the child to have an opportunity to develop the skills required to pay attention and to use fundamental vision skills more efficiently while they learn, thereby reducing frustration and increasing opportunity.

Helping a child improve their vision, generally involves improving one or more of the following:

- The ability to move one's eyes free of the rest of the body.
- The ability to easily shift fixation from one place to another.
- The ability to accurately point both eyes to the same place in space without excess effort and with a stable alignment. Unstable alignment often leads to the complaint of words moving on the page or momentary jumbling of the letters, or misalignment of numbers in maths problems.
- The ability to sustain near-centred visual attention.

Common Questions from Educators:

Q. Do I need to move the child to the front of the room?

A. Generally this is not necessary although some children benefit from this if you stay fairly stationary in the front of your room. This is because with fewer children between you and the child there are less possible distractions for the child. As well, the volume of your voice and the size of your movements and gestures are larger, which helps the child in question attend better. If for any reason there is an optical reason that is causing a decrease in visual acuity, most frequently lenses will be prescribed to improve sight to allow a child to see anything of importance from any place in your classroom.
All children should ideally be able to see the teacher and copy from the board *without* having to turn their heads or bodies to any great degree. You only need to sit side-on to a speaker in a staff meeting or conference to understand how much extra concentration this requires to pay attention.

Q. Can we help by doing any of the visual therapy in the classroom?

A. The best vision therapy is individually prescribed and delivered by trained vision therapists. This means, programs are not simply "one size fits all" and thus, specifically trained therapists are required to be able to implement the programs to gain maximum benefit. Our vision therapy programs usually include a once-weekly in-office 45-minute session of treatment with 15-20 minutes of home practice on the days that the child does not come to the office. Of course some more home practice may be helpful but we find that the 15-20 minutes assigned is adequate. We don't see a need to use your valuable class time to address these concerns for an individual child.

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Q. How do we identify a child at risk?

A. Any child not performing to potential should have a thorough vision assessment that includes all of the specialized tests that are more likely to detect functional vision problems. This would include:

- Any child performing in the lower third of the class.
- Any child exhibiting symptoms (see our symptom survey).
- Any child who demonstrates a difference between their potential and their actual achievement despite performance relative to peers. We have seen many gifted children suffer with minor vision problems that interfere with their ability to achieve to their personal best.
- Any child with a family history or personal history of learning difficulties, ADHD or dyslexia.

Q. Can you come to the school?

A. Not only do we offer education for educators through presentations, we also offer vision screenings with an important difference. Many eye tests and screens fail to adequately test near vision skills or visual functions such as tracking, focusing, eye teaming and perceptual skills. This often leaves parents and teachers with a false sense of security regarding a child's visual readiness after being told that the child's vision is "perfect".

We would love to see all children properly screened for vision problems so any concerns are addressed *before* they become a problem in the classroom. Early detection usually means problems respond faster to treatment, and there is less cost to the child, parent and educators in the long run. A sight screening, and even most standard eye exams are medically orientated and designed to detect poor sight and lazy eye at best—neither problem is likely to impact on learning and only affect 1 in 20 children entering school. And yet this is still "accepted" as being sufficient for identifying children at risk!

We have designed our vision screening to pick up not only lazy eyes, but also those vision problems that affect a child's ability to:

- To move one's eyes free of the rest of the body.
- To easily shift fixation from one place to another.
- To accurately point both eyes to the same place in space without excess effort and with a stable alignment.
- To sustain near-centred visual attention

School Screenings & Information Seminars

If you would like to have us conduct a vision screening at your school, do a presentation for teachers, or an information session for parents, please contact us. These services are provided free of charge. We also provide brochures and materials for more information. Please call 07 5520 5900 or email us info@harmonyvisioncare.com.au.

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