

**Title: If You Can't See It, How Can You Read It? Good Vision and Literacy --
There's a Clear Connection**

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Complete text:

Children will not learn to read if they cannot focus on the chalkboard or on the words in a book.

Canada is facing a staggering rate of illiteracy -- some statistics place it as high as 25%.

We all have a role to play in eliminating the problem.

- * It is estimated that one in six children has a visual performance problem. Not all such problems are easy to detect. Young children have no basis for comparison of what their vision should be, and will accept limited vision as normal until someone identifies the problem.
- * Most visual problems fall into two categories:
 - 1) the obvious ones, which can be detected by the standard eye chart test;
 - 2) the not-so-obvious ones, which deal with such things as eye coordination, perceptual, or near point focusing problems. These are the problems that often inhibit a person's ability to read and learn.

Good Vision and Literacy

The eyes normally work together as a team. Images seen from each eye are merged into a single image in the brain. If the eyes are not coordinated, an individual may have difficulty reading.

Some symptoms that may indicate a child has a vision problem:

- * loses place while reading
- * avoids close work
- * holds reading material closer than normal
- * tends to rub eyes
- * has headaches
- * turns or tilts head to use one eye only
- * makes reversals when reading or writing
- * uses finger to maintain place while reading
- * omits or confuses small words when reading

Some behavioral indications of possible vision difficulty:

- * short attention span for the child's age, or frequent daydreaming
- * difficulty remembering what has been read
- * difficulty with sequential concepts
- * displays evidence of developmental immaturity

There's A Clear Connection

Vision is a set of skills and abilities. 20/20 (6/6) eyesight is only one of these. A child may see the chalkboard clearly at 20 feet (6m), but may still have symptoms such as blurred vision, eyestrain, headaches or fatigue while reading, due to problems with eye coordination or focusing.

- * At least 80% of all learning is visual.
- * There is scientific evidence which suggests children who experience reading difficulties are more likely to have vision problems than children who are accomplished readers.
- * As many as 3/4 of adults with challenged literacy skills, when tested, fail at least one section of a visual screening examination.
- * Most visual problems can be successfully treated. Early detection and correction will improve a child's ability to learn and read.

FACTS: CHILDREN AND VISION

- * It is estimated that at least one in six children has a visual performance problem. In fact, some studies show as many as four out of every ten children may have vision problems that impair their ability to learn.
- * Children with poor eye coordination may have problems reading for long periods. This can lead to frustration when the child cannot keep up with his or her peers in the classroom, and result in behaviour problems.
- * A child who has not developed clear vision by age six is not apt to do so in later life. Parents are advised that they should take children for complete vision examinations between one and three years of age.
- * Parents and children in low income families are 400 per cent more likely to experience vision problems, and often do not take advantage of accessible health services to address these problems.
- * Reading requires the integration of eight different vision skills: visual acuity; visual fixation; accommodation; binocular fusion; convergence; stereopsis; field of vision; and form perception.
- * Many parents rely on vision screening tests in schools to identify problems with their children's vision. However, these tests do not check for many vision problems. Even a child with 20/20 vision (visual acuity) may have other vision problems.
- * Children who are avid readers have a tendency to become short-sighted in later life. Parents should encourage their children who read frequently to take breaks and get involved in different activities.
- * Quite simply, children will not learn to read if they cannot focus on the chalkboard or on the words in a book. Early detection and correction of vision problems is a major element in helping children become achieving readers.
- * Not all children with vision problems will require glasses. Some problems such as poor ability to "track" words on a page, or adjust from reading up close (a book) to far away (a blackboard) can often be corrected with daily eye exercises that parents can do with their child at home.
- * The visual ability to read print is elementary compared with the visual demands of many new technologies. Children will require excellent visual skills to deal with these new technologies throughout their lives.

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