

> HEALTHY VISION RESOURCE



VISION PROBLEMS

can be mistaken for ADHD



The criteria for the diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorders (with or without Hyperactivity) are covered in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V). Before children are diagnosed with ADHD or any Specific Learning Disabilities (such as Dyslexia), vision should be ruled out as a possible cause for the symptoms the child is struggling with (as well as any other potentially contributing factor such as hearing, etc.).

However, the majority of children we see in our office who struggle with reading and attention have 20/20 visual acuity in addition to a variety of visual deficits contributing to their challenges. But because their visual acuity is fine, parents and educators often incorrectly think that vision has been ruled out. Yet visual acuity is only one of 17 different visual skills that are vital for reading and learning.

Binocular Vision Disorders (visual skills which require the use of both eyes working together in unison) have a wide variety of symptoms, and many of them are similar to those on the ADHD symptom checklist. Before a child is diagnosed with ADHD it is vital to rule out a Binocular Vision Disorder.

In addition, according to the DSM-V, the symptoms must be present in 2 or more settings for 6 months or longer before someone is diagnosed with ADHD. When a student has a Binocular Vision Disorder, the symptoms will be present wherever the student is trying to read; so, it doesn't matter how many different environments or settings the student is in, the student will have difficulty paying attention.

The key point is that when children struggle to pay attention in school, visual acuity (how clearly one can see) is often checked and **vision is incorrectly ruled out** as a possible cause. Visual acuity is strictly a measure of how clearly one can see the letters on the eye chart which is 20 feet away. Reading takes place within arm's distance, around 18 inches. There are 17 visual skills required for academic performance and being able to see the letters on the eye chart (visual acuity) is just one of these skills.

It is important to understand that vision screenings are not designed to test all of these visual skills; yet if a child is missing even one of these skills, academic performance could be negatively impacted. The majority of children who struggle with Binocular Vision Disorders have excellent visual acuity. Binocular Vision Disorders include eye coordination, eye tracking and eye focusing disorders which can make print look blurry, double, and often appear to move. Children can lose their place when reading, and often have difficulty remembering or comprehending what they have read. Reading fluency often suffers as well.

An easy way for parents to tell if their child may have a vision problem contributing to their attention difficulties is to consider how long their child pays attention when read to. If a school-aged child has no problem with paying attention when the story is read to him or her but has difficulty attending when the information is presented visually, then it is likely that this child may be missing one or more of the visual skills required for reading and learning.

When you have a child who has difficulty concentrating in school or at home, especially when it comes to reading or writing assignments, it is vital that you rule out the possibility that a vision problem may be contributing to your child's difficulties, before assuming that it's ADD/ADHD. When you have your child's vision checked, **make sure you see a Developmental Optometrist** to ensure all the visual skills critical to reading and learning are evaluated.



VISIONS

THErapy CENTER

6205 S. Minnesota Ave.
(605) 271.7100

visions@sdvisions.com
sdvisions.com