

What I Learned About Vision Therapy

Carla Ward, RECE

January 6, 2015

Eyes are the windows to the soul; a saying we have heard once or twice through our lives. Our eyes help us do a million and one things every day. Without our eyesight we couldn't appreciate the beauty of a flower or the first snowfall. We wouldn't be able to read and become absorbed in a book.

Today I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Fabian Tai, a developmental optometrist in Mississauga. What is the difference between a general and developmental optometrist? A general optometrist examines, diagnoses and treats diseases, injuries and disorders of the eye. A developmental optometrist treats functional vision problems, such as binocular vision, eye movement and depth perception. Developmental optometrists look at your eyes 360 degrees. It is important to check the function of one's eyes, especially in children, as undetected vision problems can cause poor reading skills, poor writing skills, such as reversals of letters and numbers into older grades, poor comprehension skills, poor hand-eye coordination and focusing problems.

A challenge in detecting visual deficiencies is having children know what's normal with regards to their vision so they can communicate there is a problem. Through my conversation with Dr. Tai, I found it very interesting how he detects signs of potential visual deficiencies before a full exam. Interestingly, a child can pass the eye chart test perfectly and still have underlying vision problems. Dr. Tai mentioned that he found children with vision deficiencies, who are suffering in school, often show signs of lowered self-esteem, are more quiet and generally don't complain about having any eye problems. He would complete a general eye exam that you or I would have during a routine optometry check-up. Then if there was any suspicion of further vision problems, he would ask questions to the child about their school work, do they like reading, do they have a hard time remembering what they'd read, do they sometimes have a hard time seeing the letters on a page with lots of words. From this conversation, if a child needed further assessment, he would then run a more in depth exam to look at their visual skills. Visual skills are your tracking skills, fixation, ability to change focus, visual discrimination, binocularity, depth perception, peripheral vision, visual memory and near and distant acuity. A weakness in any of these areas can affect a child from being their best in school and life. Should any signs of deficiency appear, then a vision therapy program is put together for the child.

I left Dr. Tai's office with my questions answered, a need to find out more and an appointment to have my eyes checked in a month. One question I can't seem to shake is, are vision deficiencies hiding behind learning disabilities? There is so much information to read regarding visual deficiencies and vision therapy, but the information I have read, has made me wonder if certain children's behaviours are masking their frustration with their eyesight.