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## What parents need to know about children with vision-related problems

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### Abstract

The article is recommended to a wide circle of readers, including specialists of mental defects and physical handicaps working at specialized educational establishments and parents of children with visual disorder of every description. Several recommendations concerning the early disclosure of some visual disorders are provided in a given article. What's more, the article highlights how parents and educators alike should behave when discovering visual pathologies in preschool children. Examples of games with asthenopic children are presented in the article, together with the methods of development of their speech and correction of their pronunciation, as well as a number of ways of how to cope, jointly with a child, with the fear of space etc.

**Keywords:** asthenopic children, vision, myopia, visual load, the development of speech, aural memory, imitation, specialist.

### Introduction

Our sense organs, the very complicated nerve devices, are the main source of information about the environment. The famous German natural scientist and physicist, G. Gemgolts wrote: "Of all the man's sense organs, the eye was always recognized as the superfine gift and the marvelous work of Nature's creative power. Poets glorified it, orators eulogized it and philosophers apotheosized the eye as a standard, demonstrating what the organic forces are capable of, while physicists tried to copy the eye as an unachievable pattern of optical devices".

The scientist I.M. Sechenov claimed that the eye is the most perfect organ and there is no organ equal to it. It is well-known that even the loss of a small portion of vision may change the man's destiny. The role of vision in the life of every individual can hardly be overestimated. It is the vision that makes the working and creative activities possible. Thanks to the eyes, we obtain 95 per cent of information about the world. Due to the eyes, a child freely gets his bearings in the surroundings. Visually, it is quicker to memorize how to hold a spoon in one's arms, how to reach a toy etc. The vision helps to rapidly notice a danger. Closely connected with the vision are all the initial skills, which are indispensable for a child's harmonious development. Even in case of an insignificant vision reduction, a child doesn't see some objects in the distance, and sometimes a child with vision-related problems can see them only partially. In case of different visual disorders, an incorrect or distorted picture of objects and phenomena in the world may emerge. And this, in turn, may lead to the formation in such children of inaccurate and inadequate ideas of the environment. This raises many questions, for instance, how to ensure the full development of vision, how to preserve it, how to bring up a child with visual disorder and others.

It is necessary to be very conscious and attentive when bringing up a child with visual disorder, and to analyze all his actions, games and so on. It is also very important that parents, having detected the slightest deviations from the norm in the first days of a child's life, should ask for a specialist's advice. Consulting specialists systematically, keeping to all their recommendations and maintaining the mode of visual work may help to prevent any vision impairment.

In some cases, the vision decline may result from the infringement of sanitary-hygienic norms during the intense period of school education.

It is necessary to begin corrective work with a child with visual disorder from the first months of his life. This requires the maintenance of emotional contact with him, as well as the enrichment of his experience with tactile and kinesthetic feelings: by changing the position of his body, stroking him from time to time, involving a child in passive-active exercises and attracting his attention to the feelings that emerge at the moment. Measures such as the development of orientation in space and the conduct of special speech-development lessons are of great

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importance. At the same time, it is necessary to devote attention to the development of the semantic aspect of speech, in order to prevent the emergence of so-called “parrot-like” speech, when a child readily copies his acquaintances’ speech without understanding its meaning. Adults should comment every step during their intercourse with a child, fixing every object in a word, including its features, characteristics, a state, an action etc. Lexical symbols facilitate the meaningful perception and distinct differentiation of the surrounding world. A special object-developing setting is needed for the sensory development of a child with visual disorder. It is also necessary to organize various types of activity, such as intercourse, games, movement, work, drawing, building and the like. The development of motility and physical training is very important, too.

The democratic character of relations between parents and a child with visual disorder is optimal: they should pay attention to his opinion, respect his standpoint, develop his independent judgment and create the atmosphere of love and mutual esteem.

Parents should have a certain level of pedagogic education, allowing them to bring up and teach a child with visual disorder at home, without doing any harm to his health and study.

In many cases, the vision reduction may be caused by a progressively developing myopia or by an intense visual load, especially if there is a hereditary predisposition to myopia in a child. Some children suffer from the vision reduction that may suddenly emerge after any shock. If a serious visual disorder is found out only before a child goes to school, and nothing was known about this defect earlier, it is completely ascribed to his parents’ negligence. They should visit an ophthalmologist for the first time soon after their child’s birth. At the age of 2 or 3, as a rule, a child’s visual acuity is checked for the first time, and such defects as squint and amblyopia are easily diagnosed. After that, a child’s vision is checked directly before he goes to school and then – at the age of 11-12 and 14-15.

In cases where a certain visual disorder is discovered in a child, his parents should, first of all, consult specialists, whereupon their child should be provided with all the required optical devices. If his vision fails to achieve the normal level with the help of these devices, his parents should try their best to teach their child to make use of additional sources of learning the surrounding world. First of all, teach a child to carefully examine objects. For instance, giving a toy to a child, you may scrutinize it together with him. “Here is a hare, it is grey (white). Here are its tail and ears. Look, the ears are long, they jut out, the hare is listening to something. Look thoroughly at it and grope it. The hare also has a nose, nostrils etc.” It is very important at this point to give an impetus by teaching a child to examine, grope and use different objects.

Insufficient information that arrives through the visual analyzer should be complemented with taction. Examining an object, a child should grope and touch it, hear how it sounds, what a smell it emits and so on in the same vein. This enriches his experience, giving him a more precise idea of different objects and teaching him to strain his eyes less when getting to know the objects.

Much good may walks-excursions do a child with visual disorder. What he knows only from somebody’s words, he learns from his personal experience, because other sense organs take part in cognition of the surroundings (smell, taste etc.) It would also be of benefit to children with visual

disorder if they are given the possibility to draw, shape or carve what they see and remember during the walk.

Sometimes the development of speech delays in children with visual defects. It is common knowledge that pronunciation depends not only on hearing, but on vision as well. A child sees how words are articulated, mimics the movements of lips and a tongue, and, as a consequence, he better pronounces what cannot be heard or perceived by ear.

That is why parents, who wish to help their child with vision-related problems, should always speak distinctly and slowly and stand not very close to him. If he has a good aural memory, a child with visual disorder may accumulate a rather rich vocabulary (with most words meaning nothing to him). It is, therefore, necessary to combine the detailed study, examination and groping of objects with the comparison of them with other objects. At the same time, distinguishing and naming their features is very important. The objects, with which a child became acquainted in the past, are directly described in the manner that is clear to him. The songs memorized by a child should be accompanied by movements and scenes. This will make a lesson much more meaningful.

Children with vision-related problems, asthenopic and, especially, blind ones are afraid of moving and of space in general. This can be explained by the fact that they often run into objects and stumble.

Children should be taught to get over their fear of space on a step-by-step basis. First of all, parents should carefully explore, together with a child, the interior and domestic conditions. Try not to change them. Each object should be at a strictly fixed place, for a child to be able to easily find or go round it. After that it is necessary to familiarize him with the courtyard. To ensure that a child moves there with enough confidence, parents need to accompany a child in his walks out of doors, as well as to teach him to observe traffic regulations.

At times, some children with vision-related problems make faces, plain gestures and movements. Since they poorly see their reflection in the mirror, they do not notice such shortcomings in others and cannot imagine how this looks from a distance. For this reason, it is difficult for them to get rid of all their shortcomings themselves. It goes without saying that their unsightly grimacing and gesticulation make an unpleasant impression on their acquaintances. That is why some people even gibe at them, which, in turn, may have an adverse effect on a child’s general condition and personality as a whole, unless his parents stop this phenomenon in good time.

In pedagogical work with asthenopic children, it is advisable to take into consideration the state of the visual analyzer’s functions and the possibility to form visual functions with the help of pedagogical methods. During the lessons and games, both the general functional activity of the optic system and its distinguishing sensitivity increase, the formation of binocular fixation is under way and the oculomotor functions are trained. The stimulation of colour discrimination and stereoscopy of vision, when the intenseness and size of a stimulus change, is good in extending the scope of visual functions’ capacity. Following an ophthalmologist’s recommendations and depending on the stage of regenerative treatment, a pedagogue draws children into different didactic games and exercises, which are designed to activate, stimulate and train a child’s visual functions. It is necessary to help a child to opportunely get rid of flaws. He should be tactfully, delicately and benevolently explained that both the grimacing and unsightly gesticulation make an inimical impression and,

therefore, these flaws should be eliminated as soon as possible. Parents and educators should exert every effort to improve, where possible, the outward appearance of children, to ensure that they wear comfortable and proper clothes and have their hair cut and brushed fittingly. At the same time, all this should be done as tactfully as possible, without emphasizing the need to do it.

Benevolence, care, attention, sympathy, understanding and the desire to assist a child with vision-related problems in getting over a variety of difficulties, to say warm words in time and to encourage – all these measures are instrumental in winning his love and confidence and evoking reciprocal positive feelings, which should be relied on when upbringing and schooling a child with visual disorder.

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