

HEALTH BARRIERS TO LEARNING: VISION PROBLEMS

Why are vision problems a Health Barrier to Learning?

No matter how good of an educator you are, it can be difficult to help move students towards academic success if they cannot see well. If a student has a vision problem, it is likely it will affect them in the classroom. Myopia (nearsighted), Hyperopia (farsighted), Amblyopia (lazy eye), and other vision conditions impact a student's focus, reading skills, and motivation to participate in classroom activities.

About 20% of school-aged children have a vision problem. Many vision problems can be screened for and corrected with proper care. If students with vision problems correctly wear their glasses in the classroom and while doing homework, it will help their overall academic performance.

How can I tell if a student may have a vision problem?

Students may not be able to tell they have a vision problem. They may believe the way they see is normal and not a problem. There are some signs that may help you notice a student is having trouble seeing in the classroom. These include:

- Trouble paying attention
- Trouble reading the board
- Headaches or eye pain
- Taking longer than expected to complete classwork
- Refusing to read
- Squinting or getting really close to the paper
- Asking to move closer to the front of the room

What can I do in the classroom?

Vision screenings may happen in your school during the school year. If a student is screened and referred to a follow-up exam, talk to the student and family about the importance of vision. After a referral, many families do not follow up to make sure students receive glasses. You can help parents understand the importance of follow up.

If there is no screening in your school, and you think a student is having trouble seeing, talk to the school nurse and the student's family.

Monitor students who should be wearing glasses in the classroom. Talk with the school nurse and the students' parents to find out when students should be wearing glasses in the classroom (i.e. reading, all of the time, to see the board) and try to remind them to wear their glasses when they are needed. It may take students a few weeks to get adjusted to wearing glasses and overcome some of the mild side effects of glasses, like headaches.

Try to sit a student in a spot that will help them see better. Talk to the school nurse or student's family to see if specific instructions about seating were given after a screening or eye exam.

Ganley JP and Roberts J. Eye conditions and related need for medical care among persons 1-74 years of age: United States, 1971-1972. Vital Health Stat 11(228). 1983. Page 21, Table 1.

Krumholtz, I. (2000). Results from a pediatric vision screening and its ability to predict academic performance. Optometry, 71, 426-430.