

# IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOW-UP EYE EXAMINATION AFTER RECEIVING REFERRAL FROM A VISION SCREENING



## Story from Head Start employee:

“She seemed sort of spacy, as if she were in her own little world, usually a step behind the other students. She would often interrupt story time to come forward and peer at the pictures in the book.”

After receiving a referral from a vision screening, having an eye examination, and receiving, and wearing, prescription glasses . . . the story continues . . . with a happy ending.

“The cutest moment was when she and a friend were walking hand-in-hand around the playground. He was pointing out different things to her, and she would excitedly exclaim, ‘**I can see that now!**’ ”

This child is “now very aware and an active participant of everything that is happening in the classroom and will truly be ready for kindergarten!”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KppFt41nHrY>

## MAIN MESSAGE

The important part of the above story is that the child’s parent made an eye examination appointment after receiving a referral from a vision screening.

If the eye examination had not occurred, this child would not have received prescription eyeglasses and would be unable to see the things her friend pointed out during a walk around the playground.

A simple pair of prescription glasses could make a difference in your child’s life.

## This is what should happen:

- A child receives a vision screening in the community to see if the child might have a vision problem.
- The child does not pass vision screening, which means the child may have a vision problem and would benefit from receiving an eye examination from an eye doctor.
- A referral from the child’s vision screening goes to the parent, caregiver, or guardian recommending the child receive an eye examination from an eye doctor to see if the child has a vision disorder.
- The parent, caregiver, or guardian schedules an appointment with an eye doctor, takes the child to the eye doctor’s office for an eye examination, buys eyeglasses if needed, and continues with follow-up visits with the eye doctor.

## Instead, and too often, this happens:

- A child receives a vision screening in the community to see if the child might have a vision problem.
- The child does not pass vision screening, meaning the child may have a vision problem and would benefit from receiving an eye examination from an eye doctor.
- A referral from the child’s vision screening goes to the parent, caregiver, or guardian recommending the child receive an eye examination from an eye doctor.
- And here is where the breakdown occurs: The eye examination does not happen, and the child may continue to have an untreated vision problem that can affect the child’s development, learning, future job opportunities, and even lead to permanent vision loss.



Geoffrey E. Bradford, MD, pediatric ophthalmologist, West Virginia University Eye Institute, does eye exam.

Many times, the referral letter for an eye examination comes home in a backpack. You may receive many papers in your child's backpack to review at the end of a hectic day, or even the beginning of another hectic day. For example, you may be working two jobs to put food on the table or to prevent the power company from turning off your lights. You barely have time to look at those papers. Or, you work only one job, but still do not have enough time to review each item in your child's backpack.

Sometimes you may receive the referral letter through a text message or an email and do not know how to schedule an eye examination. Or, you cannot take your child to an eye doctor because you cannot get time off from work.

It is also possible you do not take your child to an eye doctor because you think your child does not have a vision problem, even if your child did not pass a vision screening. You may think your child does not have a vision problem because you cannot see the vision problem.

Just because you cannot see a vision problem does not mean your child does not have a vision problem. Most vision problems are invisible, unlike when your child falls, scrapes a knee, and requires a bandage. You can see the hurt knee. This is only one example of the many reasons preventing a child from receiving an eye examination.

When your child receives a referral for an eye examination from a vision screening done in the community, such as at Head Start or school, some of you immediately make an appointment for an eye examination.

For others of you, taking your child to an eye doctor for an eye examination may be scary or difficult to arrange, but this visit to the eye doctor is important for many reasons.

### **WHY TAKING YOUR CHILD TO THE EYE DOCTOR MATTERS**

One important reason? Some vision conditions occur only during childhood, can lead to permanent vision loss if not treated early, and can best be treated when found early. For more information on common early childhood vision disorders, visit: [Common Children's Vision Problems](#) on the Prevent Blindness website, or [Common Early Childhood Vision Disorders](#), or see the [Glossary of Eye and Vision Terms](#).

When you take your child for an eye examination, the eye doctor checks your child's vision and eye health. If your child's eye doctor finds a vision problem and recommends treatment, such as corrective eyeglasses, it is important to get the eyeglasses, for your child to wear the eyeglasses, and to attend follow-up visits to change the eyeglasses prescription, if needed.

Another reason taking your child to an eye doctor matters is because undetected, undiagnosed, and uncorrected vision problems have been associated with poor school performance, such as problems with learning to read or disruptive behaviors in the classroom ([Vision and Classroom Behaviors](#)).

Helping your child have the best vision possible now can help your child succeed in school in later years.

### **Comment from a parent about not taking their child for an eye examination:**

"We have the habit that if we visualize something there is a problem, but if we don't see anything wrong, then there is nothing wrong." \*

Please know that many vision problems are invisible. Because you cannot see a vision problem does not mean your child does not have a vision problem. We can't see that kids can't see.

### **Success story from a school nurse:**

A child did not pass vision screening and the child's parents did not take the child to an eye doctor for 2 years. After the child visited an eye doctor and received eyeglasses, the child "was so excited that she could see every blade of grass and leaves on the trees."

### **Comment from a parent whose child had an eye examination:**

"She got an award . . . because she is one of the highest ranking children in her class in reading. So I said wow. And she said, 'Yeah mom, I put on the glasses and I am reading!' " \*\*





## SUMMARY

We can't see that kids can't see.

You likely will not know your child has blurred vision. Your child likely will not know if their vision is blurred. Your child's teacher may not know your child has blurred vision.

You and your child will know if your child has blurred vision only if your child has an eye examination from an eye doctor.

If you receive a referral for an eye examination from your child's vision screening, follow-up with an eye doctor. Schedule an appointment for an eye examination, take your child to the eye examination, and follow the eye doctor's treatment plan.

## Success story from a school nurse:

"A little boy in kindergarten could see fine out of one eye; however, his other eye could not. I was not even able to get him to read the very top letter (of an eye chart). His mom took him to the eye doc and he was patched and his vision was corrected.

His father was in tears because he was so grateful that this (vision disorder) was caught.

He (the little boy in kindergarten) is now a beautiful 6'4" high school student doing very well in school and life. His parents still thank me."

## TO-DO LIST

- If you receive a referral for an eye examination because your child did not pass a vision screening, schedule an eye examination, take your child to the eye doctor's office for the eye examination, and follow the eye doctor's suggestions.
- Look at **How to Schedule an Eye Examination** if you need help scheduling an eye exam for your child.
- Look at Visit **Your Child's Sight – Taking Your Child to the Eye Doctor** on the Prevent Blindness website or **How to Schedule an Eye Examination** for information on preparing for the eye exam, such as what to bring with you to the eye exam and questions to ask the eye doctor.
- If you think having an eye examination is scary, check out these two videos that show what will happen during your child's eye exam:
  - What to Expect at the Pediatric Ophthalmologist. Video from the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus (AAPOS) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7UCn6npC20&feature=youtu.be>
  - Your Child's Eye Exam - Dr. Tracey Strombeck. Video from Prevent Blindness Wisconsin - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebzOAI9mjug>
- If your child's eye doctor recommends prescription glasses, buy the prescription glasses, and make sure your child wears the eyeglasses.
- If dollars are tight and your budget does not have extra money for follow-up care with an eye doctor, financial resources are available to help you cover the cost of an eye exam and eyeglasses. Visit this link for more information: **Financial Assistance Information**.

## REFERENCES:

\*\* Dudovitz, R. N., Izadpanah, N., Chung, P. J., & Slusser, W. (2016). Parent, teacher, and student perspectives on how corrective lenses improve child wellbeing and school function. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 20(5), 974–983. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4826825/pdf/nihms743856.pdf>

\* Frazier, M., Garces, I., Scarinci, I., & Marsh-Tootle, W. (2009). Seeking eye care for children: Perceptions among Hispanic immigrant parents. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 11(3), 215–221. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-008-9160-4>

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**Prevent  
Blindness**  
Our Vision Is Vision.

“Small Steps for Big Vision” is an initiative of the National Center for Children’s Vision and Eye Health at Prevent Blindness ([www.nationalcenter.preventblindness.org](http://www.nationalcenter.preventblindness.org)). For more information, contact: [info@preventblindness.org](mailto:info@preventblindness.org)

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