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Does your child have difficulty keeping her place when reading?

Have trouble paying attention in school?

Ignore what you say at times?

These can all be signs of vision or hearing problems. And the signs can be hard to recognize.

"When a child has problems seeing or hearing, the parents are often the last to know," says Trish Rollinger, RN, Covenant Home Health. "A child may have had the problem for a long time — she may not realize it's not normal to have to squint to see the blackboard."

Because these symptoms can be hard to detect, vision and hearing tests are performed in the schools. Covenant Home Health nurses Trish Rollinger, RN, and Cindy Ozier, RN, are certified to perform these vision and hearing tests for children. They say that the tests are important because they help to catch problems early on.

"Children with hearing problems may have trouble in school," says Ozier. "They often can't speak as well, and may fail classes. So people may think they're 'slow,' when the problem can actually be fixed with a hearing aid or medical treatment."

Rollinger says detecting vision problems early also makes them easier to fix. "Many children have amblyopia, which means one eye is stronger than the other. This can easily be treated by putting a patch over the normal eye to strengthen the weaker eye. If it's left untreated, it could lead to irreversible vision problems."

Along with amblyopia, school vision tests can detect common vision problems, such as myopia (nearsightedness), hyperopia (farsightedness), and color blindness. In this test, the children look through an instrument to read letters and count how many lines they see.

In a hearing test, the children listen through headphones to a series of tones, and must indicate when they hear the sounds. School hearing tests can determine whether a child can hear different intensities (loudness) or frequencies (itches). Poor hearing could be caused by a chronic ear infection, obstruction, or a defect the child was born with.

Preschoolers and grade school students are given vision and hearing tests in the schools every year. If a child fails the first vision test or hearing test, the test must be taken again. If the child fails the second time, a notice is sent home, referring the child to a physician.

"It's very important for the parents to follow through with treatment," says Ozier. "We can detect that there's a problem, but a physician must diagnose the condition and provide treatment. The schools and nurses send reminders, but it's really up to the parents to make sure the problem gets fixed." These are fairly simple steps, but they can be very important in a child's development and self-esteem.



It can be difficult to detect vision or hearing problems in some children. However, if you notice these signs, you should bring your child to a doctor to be tested:

Your child may have poor vision if he/she:

- Has head tipped to a particular position when reading.
- Has trouble keeping the place when reading.
- Holds books in an unusual position.
- Closes or squeezes eyes shut for a few seconds before trying to see.
- Covers one eye to look at something.
- Rubs eyes when trying to see something.

Your child may have poor hearing if he/she:

- Has trouble paying attention.
- Ignores or disobeys people, especially when it's not typically the child's nature.
- Constantly asks people to repeat themselves.
- Has poor speech development.
- Repeatedly has ear infections.