**Occupational Therapy and Childhood Vision**

**Brought to you by MiOTA’s Research & Education SIS  
 August is Children’s Eye Health and Safety Month**

**August 2024 is Children’s Eye Health and Safety Month**, an initiative of Prevent Blindness.org (2019). Their goal is to raise awareness of issues related to children’s vision and eye health prior to children returning to school. They emphasize how healthy vision contributes to children’s school readiness and overall development. A variety of free educational resources are available for parents, caregivers, teachers, and health professionals working to keep children’s eyes healthy to aid in learning and school success.

Their aims dovetail with goals of OT practitioners who screen children with suspected visual issues that can affect school related performances and post school preparation. Several key visual skills for functional vision have been identified and include eye movement control, central and peripheral vision, binocular coordination, accommodation, and gross and fine visual motor skills (Lazarus, 2020).

***Children Vision Statistics***

Vision accounts for 80% of classroom learning and about 600,000 U.S. children have problems with their vision (AFB, 2023; Lazarus, 2021). Teachers may observe students having difficulty reading, poor eye-hand coordination with school tasks and activities. Caregivers may notice children rushing through homework, closing one eye, or tilting their head to read, watery or red eyes, sitting close to the TV or squinting (Sierratherapygroup, 2016).

**OT Practitioners**

Children referred to OT may exhibit learning or behavioral issues secondary to undiagnosed visual problems. Occupational therapy practitioners understand that vision is more complicated than whether a child needs corrective lens. Although common visual impairments may be due to neurological, muscular, or structural conditions resulting in acuity and perceptual deficits, occupational therapists use non-surgical methods to aid young children with vision impairments. An occupational therapist may also suggest the use of adaptive equipment or modification to typical childhood environment, i.e., school, home, avocational or work settings.

Mun and Syracusa (2024) in a qualitative study, described OT evaluative processes for visual deficits in pediatric settings. Twenty-one occupational therapists with experience in pediatrics and vision evaluations completed structured interviews. Common symptoms reported by children who displayed visual deficits included headaches, double vision, clumsiness, reading, handwriting, and difficulty copying.

Two themes emerged from the study:(1) OTs benefited from working in partnership with optometrists when treating visual deficits and (2) ways the visual system impacted a child’s overall functioning. Authors suggested that pediatric OTs can identify concerns impacting childhood occupational performance to help these children progress academically and become more independent despite visual problems.

Doxsey and Jones (2021) further suggest that OTPs can benefit from collaborating with teachers of the visually impaired (TVI) as they seek to provide best practices and resources for children with visual problems. Additionally, taking continuing education courses, specifically at a school for the blind or similar institutions, can enhance the OTP’s ability to create interventions supporting the occupational performance of students with visual impairments.

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