Orthoptic Visual Processing Difficulties Clinic - information for patients and referrers

Introduction

Welcome to the Orthoptic Visual Processing Difficulties Clinic. We run clinics at Wycombe, Amersham and Stoke Mandeville hospitals.

This information will help you understand how we can help in the assessment of children with visual processing difficulties (VPD).

The aim of the clinic is to diagnose and treat visual problems which may interfere with a child's education. The clinic is not intended to replace the expertise of teachers, SENCOs, specialist teachers, or educational psychologists, nor can we give any diagnoses of dyslexia, or any specific learning difficulties or other educational problems.

Our Orthoptic expertise lies in visual processing difficulties such as ocular motility (eye movement) problems, visual stress/discomfort, problems in eye tracking movements and visual perception difficulties. Visual processing difficulties and specific learning issues do not necessarily go hand in hand. However, some children may well have some characteristics of learning difficulties alongside an underlying visual problem. Treating any area of visual difficulty will not resolve a learning issue, but it will help the child to manage their issue more effectively and enable them to better access the information needed for learning.

It would be especially useful if you could arrange for your child to visit an Optometrist (Optician) for a general vision test before the appointment to make sure that the child does not need glasses or to make sure their current glasses are up to date. All eye services for children are free. Please bring your child's glasses and a copy of any glasses prescriptions if the child is already wearing glasses.

The Clinical assessment

The Visual Processing Difficulties clinical assessment is in four sections:

1

We assess the ability of your child to use their eyes together as a pair (binocular vision), and the focusing mechanisms of their eyes. For example: your child may difficulties with their near sight (accommodative insufficiency). This can be treated with exercises or glasses. Or your child may have a squint (turn in the eye) which is interfering with what they see.

The symptoms of visual stress such as blurring or moving print and signs such as excessive blinking or watering eyes can be a sign of binocular vision difficulty. It is therefore very important for your child to see an Orthoptist to ensure a full eye examination before any specialised assessments.

2

We specifically assess saccadic eye movements. These are very small movements required for reading. A difficulty with your child's voluntary saccades can lead to eye-tracking problems. (for example, difficulties in following the words of a book).

Eye-tracking problems will affect a child's reading and comprehension. They may exhibit signs of 'head bobbing' when reading (the head is making the movements rather than the eyes), rubbing their eyes and feeling discomfort when reading, or fatigue with prolonged reading. Eye-tracking problems can be treated with a series of exercises aimed at improving these eye movements.

3

We assess visual stress/discomfort. Visual stress (or pattern-related visual stress) is thought to be stimulated by the striped effect of the writing, which overstimulates the visual cortex in the brain and produces symptoms. An overlay may be advised, with a tint unique to each child. The overlay is thought to redistribute the wavelengths of light entering the eye to the brain and dampen down these symptoms of visual stress. Visual stress is not curable but can be treated and significantly improved.

4

We assess visual perception, which demonstrates how well a child can process different types of visual information. If a weakness is found, exercises will be recommended.

Because of the nature of the testing and the difficulties that we are looking for, we do not normally accept referrals for children below the age of 7. This is because most of the difficulties we look for are normal for younger children to experience (for example, losing their place when reading).

If there is any concern that a child cannot see before a referral at age 7, we would suggest that the child be taken to an Optometrist (Optician) for an eye test for glasses in the first instance.

Children aged 7 and above can be referred by a GP, Optometrist, or Occupational Therapist (OT). We do not accept self-referrals.

For further information

Please contact the Orthoptic department: **01494 971720**

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please note that it is subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on any concerns you may have with your doctor.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection prevention & control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention & control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. Please follow our infection prevention and control guidelines when visiting our healthcare sites. Further information is available on our website.

Patient Advice Sheet

If you would like a copy of this information on audiotape, in large print or translated, please call the Patient Advice Liaison Service on
01296 831120 or email bht.pals@nhs.net