Spotting the Signs:

A Teacher's Guide to Possible Vision Issues

The evidence is clear. Students who can't see properly may struggle to learn properly.

Use this guide to help your students succeed in the classroom.

Keep an Eye Out

Educators are often the first to notice behaviors that may indicate a vision problem. While you can't diagnose a vision disorder, you can help identify students who might benefit from a comprehensive eye exam. Early recognition and timely communication with families and school staff can help students receive the support they need to succeed. **If you see something, take the following actions:**

Document Your Observations

Complete the "Spot the Signs of Possible Vision Problems in Children" checklist and write down specific behaviors or symptoms you've noticed or that a student has shared.

Contact School Health Staff

Determine the school's procedures for notifying families and referring students for a comprehensive eye exam.

Communicate with the Student

When appropriate, have a brief, supportive conversation with your student to understand and document what they're experiencing. Keep it private, straightforward, and reassuring.

Notify the Parent/Guardian

Share your observations with the student's family in a collaborative and supportive way. Our "Email Communication Template" features language and resources to encourage a visit to an eye care professional.

Follow Up

Check in with the parent/guardian if an evaluation has been completed by an eye-care professional. Determine whether any accommodations are needed and then implement them as appropriate.

See a sign of a vision problem? Take these steps.



Create Classroom Support

If you suspect a vision issue, there are several ways you can help a student stay engaged in classroom learning while their vision is being evaluated.

1 Optimize Seating

- Sit the student where they can best see instructional materials, typically near the front or center of the classroom.
- Give your student a clear view of the board, screen, and yourself while you instruct. Adjust the student's seating to minimize any irritation from lights or glare.

2 Use High-Contrast Materials

- Write with dark, bold markers (black, dark blue) on whiteboards or light surfaces.
- Avoid low-contrast colors (yellow, light green, or orange), which can be difficult to see.
- Provide printed materials with strong contrast and easy-to-read fonts (e.g., Arial, Helvetica) that are sans serif.

3 Vocalize Everything

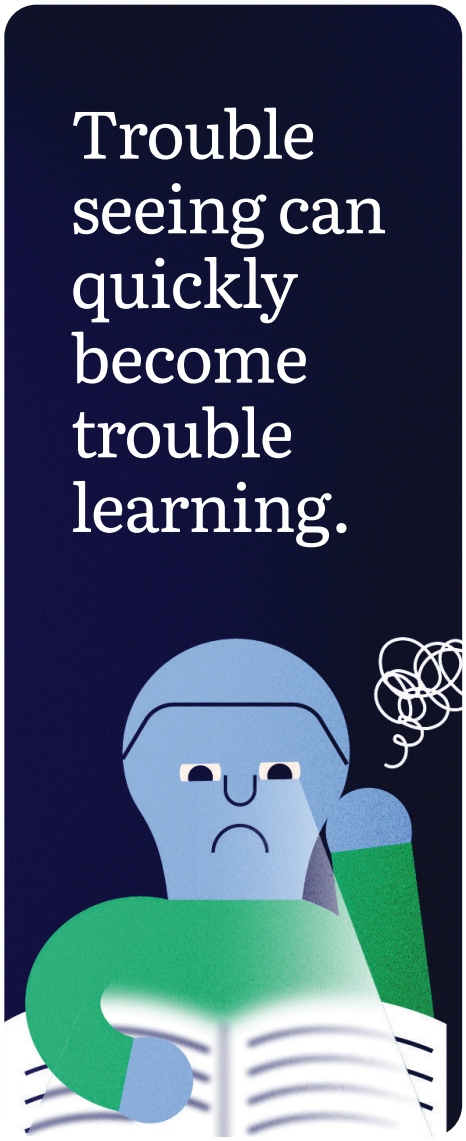
- Read aloud everything you write on the board, including key words, numbers, and instructions.
- Repeat and clarify directions out loud to reinforce understanding.
- Encourage students to ask for repetition when needed.

4 Reduce Visual Fatigue

- Offer brief, regular breaks during activities that require visual focus (e.g., reading, screen use).
- Incorporate varied instructional methods — like discussions or hands-on activities — to limit prolonged eye strain.

5 Improve Digital Learning

- Increase font size when displaying digital materials.
- Avoid overcrowded slides and documents.
- Encourage the student to zoom/enlarge digital content when needed.



Find Available Resources. Staff members in your district may be able to offer support. For example, you might consider:

- Consulting with school health staff (e.g., school nurse) to determine the school's procedures for notifying families and referring students for a comprehensive eye exam.
- Seeking guidance from teachers of students with visual impairments (TVI) or orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists, if the student in question is ultimately diagnosed with a visual impairment. Contact your district's special education department if you are unsure whether your district employs these professionals. They may be referred to by different titles.

Early recognition and proactive support can make a meaningful difference in a student's academic performance and overall well-being. By recognizing potential vision issues early and taking action, you can help every student have the opportunity to succeed.

Get tools to start a conversation about a student's sight.

go.nih.gov/childrensvision

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