

Vision and The Early Years: An Overview of Sensory Development Script

The Early Years Project

- Vision and the Early Years: An Overview of Sensory Development. This video is an introduction to hearing development.
- This video contains the following sections:
- Anatomy and Function- this will touch on how the eye works and sends information to the brain. Developmental Milestones-some important milestones related to vision. Signs of Delay- these signs may be an indication of low vision or something else and follow up with a doctor, may be helpful. Fostering Development- in this section, we have simple methods to help a child in their vision development.
- Before we dive into this information, feel free to take notes, screenshots, or pause the video at anytime. The developmental milestones and fostering development sections, have corresponding handouts in the Early Years tab on the Illinois sound beginnings website.
- illinoissoundbeginnings.org, go to the providers tab, scroll down to the Early Years Project.
- The developmental milestones are in the learning section along with the videos. Fostering development handouts are in the activities sections.
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- Anatomy and Function
- This diagram shows the main parts of the eye. The eye is a complex organ, but it can be broken down into a few parts that play an important role in the process of seeing. Cornea: This clear... dome-shaped surface covers the front of the eye... It helps focus incoming light. Iris: The colored part of the eye... controls the size of the pupil, which determines how much light enters...Pupil: The black circular opening in the center of the iris... it lets light into the eye... and adjusts size based on light levels. Lens: Located behind the iris and pupil, the lens focuses light onto the retina . It changes shape to help the eye focus on objects at different distances. Retina: This light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye, converts light into electrical signals. The retina is home to the Macula: A small central area of the retina that provides sharp, detailed central vision. Optic Nerve: This nerve transmits the electrical signals from the retina to the brain. Sclera: The white part of the eye that provides structure and protection. It surrounds most of the eyeball. Although small, the eye performs an important role of informing us about the world around us.
- This next video explains the how the eye works and sends information to the brain.
- This video was used with permission from the National Institute of Health.
- Next, we'll explore the developmental milestones related to vision. While sources outline different expectations, the milestones presented here are the most commonly cited across multiple references. To review our sources, visit the Early Years Project on the Illinois Sound Beginnings website under the Development section. Remember, you can also access a printer-friendly version of the milestones for easy reference.

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- Milestones are indicators of individual development, providing valuable insight into the progression of skills across various domains. They help us track growth and identify potential areas that may require attention or intervention.
- Vision Milestones: Birth-12 Months. Here are some milestones in the birth -9 month age range- such as: focusing on caregiver's face or following simple movements with their eyes and the 9-12 month age range- making frequent eye contact with caregivers and playing peek-a-boo.
- Vision Milestones: 1-3 years. In the 1-2 year age range- a baby will likely be able to recognize familiar objects in a book, such as a ball or cup and be able to scribble with a crayon or pencil. From 2-3 a toddler will most likely be able to play pretend with objects. An example of this would be pretending to cook by stirring a spoon in a pot. They will also be able to sort items, by color shape or size.
- Vision Milestones: 3-4 years. Between ages 3 and 4 a toddler will likely be able to do things like copy shapes and identify colors.
- Vision Milestones: 4-6 years. Between 4 and 5 years old, a child should be able to recognize the alphabet and be able to write letters and numbers. Between 5-6 a child will likely be able to use scissors with some accuracy and write recognizable letters and numbers.
- A baby's vision isn't completely developed at birth. It develops quickly during the first year of life. Here is an example of what a baby's developing vision looks like in that first year.
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- Signs of Delay
- A delay is identified by a professional through observation, assessment, and comparison to typical developmental milestones for a child's age.
- Signs of visual delay in young children may vary depending specific underlying cause and the child's individual development. Listed here are some of the common signs of an issue relating to vision development.
- Signs of delay are not a one size fits all, nor can a child be diagnosed using this list. But, if a parent, grandparent, or caregiver sees ongoing or concerning signs of auditory delay, a healthcare professional should be contacted for further evaluation.

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- Fostering Development
- The majority of brain development occurs in the first few years of life. Providing stimulating experiences, nurturing relationships, and a supportive environment is so important. This helps make connections in the brain responsible for all aspects of development, including social, emotional, and cognitive skills.
- The early years of life have the most growth and development than any other time in a person's life. The skills developed during this time, have effects that last a very long time, impacting their well-being and success in school.
- Here are some simple things that can be done to help foster development of visual skills at any age-Design environments that are visually stimulating and interesting for children, including things like color, texture, and shape contrast. Another helpful thing to do is: Engage the child in activities that encourage tracking moving things with their eyes, such as rolling a ball back and forth, or playing catch to help develop hand eye coordination.
- Fostering Development for ages birth- 1 year old. Exposing newborns to high-contrast patterns and gradually introducing high-contrast colors in the following months supports healthy visual development. These patterns are easier for babies to see and focus on, helping to stimulate brain growth and cognitive development.
- Fostering development 1-2 years. Providing a variety of toys, such as: building blocks, shape sorters, and simple puzzles- will encourage visual exploration and fine motor development. Toys with bright colors, contrasting patterns, and interesting textures are more likely to keep their attention. Another helpful activity is to Play Outside: It's an easy way to provide opportunities for visual exploration, and it helps develop depth perception and spatial awareness (understanding of where their body is in relation to other things in the environment) Some ideas are playing in sand or water, with bubble wands, collecting flowers, leaves, rocks, or playing tag.
- Fostering Development: 2-4 years. For ages 2-3, Doing arts and craft activities together promotes creativity and hand-eye coordination. Some activities ideas are: painting, drawing, coloring, and tearing, and if you're up for it, cutting and gluing paper. these promote hand-eye coordination and creativity. For 3-4-year-olds, playing matching games like Guess Who or Go Fish is a fun way to build important skills. These games help strengthen memory by teaching them to recognize and remember patterns. They also boost focus and attention, encouraging children to concentrate and see tasks through to the end.
- Fostering Development 5-6 years: Activities like word searches, Sudoku, tangrams, or building with Legos, Lincoln Logs, and Jenga can do more than just keep them entertained! These activities help kids develop early problem-solving skills by encouraging logical thinking and strategy. –

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- We also offer additional modules covering these key areas of development:
- Hearing
- Communication
- Language
- Scan the QR code to access the Early Years Project directly on the Sound Beginnings website.
- Please take our brief survey
- The Early Years Project is a collaboration between IL Hands & Voices, Guide By Your Side and the Early Hearing Detection & Intervention (or Eddie) program.
- Thank you!

All About Vision Series Video Scripts

The Early Years Project

The Role of Vision in Development

- This is the All About Vision Series, from The Early Years Project
- The Role of Vision in Development
- We use QR codes to direct you to resources within our videos. How to Use a QR Code in a Video: Pause the video when the QR code appears., Open the camera on your smartphone or tablet., Point the camera at the QR code (like you're taking a picture)., A link will pop up—tap it to open the website, activity, or resource! If it doesn't work, try holding your device steady or get closer to the screen. How to Use a QR Code from a Screenshot: Take a screenshot of the QR code when it appears in the video, Open your phone's photo gallery and find the screenshot, Tap the image to view it. On most phones, your camera or photo app will automatically detect the QR code and show a link you can tap.
- Vision plays an important role in a child's overall development, particularly in communication & social-emotional, and cognitive skills
- Babies rely heavily on visual input to learn about their environment and build early emotional bonds. If there are any delays, differences, or challenges in visual development, early detection allows for timely support, which can significantly improve meeting milestones and educational outcomes or goals.
- Vision plays a huge role in communication development from the very beginning.
- Babies watch faces to learn language and communicate.
- Communication: Hearing words along with seeing gestures and facial expressions in specific situations, helps them learn meaning.
- Social/Emotional: Vision plays a big part in how they connect to others. Healthy vision helps babies recognize faces, make eye contact, and build emotional bonds. It allows them to seek comfort, notice how others feel, share attention, and begin developing empathy.
- Cognitive: Clear vision helps babies connect what they hear with what they see. Like what happens when they shake a rattle or drop a toy. can help them understand cause and effect. As they grow, they rely on vision to recognize patterns, shapes, and objects, which helps build memory, problem-solving skills, and early understanding of the world. Supporting healthy vision and overall development supports a child's ability to learn, explore, and grow.
- Understanding vision milestones also helps parents nurture and stimulate their baby's visual skills in positive, age-appropriate ways. Milestone expectations vary among medical professionals, school systems, and early education providers. The following list compiles guidelines from multiple national organizations and is used throughout The Early Years Project. Continue to utilize the milestone expectations most relevant to you and your organization.

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- Understanding vision milestones also helps parents nurture and stimulate their baby's visual skills in positive, age-appropriate ways. Milestone expectations vary among medical professionals, school systems, and early education providers. The following list compiles guidelines from multiple national organizations and is used throughout The Early Years Project. Continue to utilize the milestone expectations most relevant to you and your organization.

- Understanding how the eye works can help support a child's development and meeting milestones, in areas such: language acquisition, social interaction, safety awareness, and overall well-being. Check out our introduction video to see how the eye works. This QR code, takes you to the Learning section of the Early Years, where the video will be.
- Understanding typical vision milestones also helps parents nurture and stimulate their baby's visual skills in positive, age-appropriate ways. Specific Milestones are reviewed in the intro video as well, and you can go to the Handout on our website by scanning the QR code for a printer friendly version.
- Lastly, these milestones serve as a guide. If you have a trusted source that you use for child development, please continue to use that.
- Here are a couple of popular and reputable sources for early childhood developmental milestones that are trusted by professionals and families. The Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Their website: [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) has milestones, as well as a lot of information for parents about health issues, safety, and information on things such as formula, potty training, fitness, and more.
- It can be really hard to tell if a baby or young child has something else going on by monitoring milestones alone. It's a simple concept, but I think giving an example makes it easier to remember, so let's walk through a situation that parents and caregivers can relate to.
- This is Maya. She is 9 months old, she loves cuddles and peekaboo. Her dad enjoys watching her explore the world. But lately, he's noticed something that concerns him.
- She smiles when he talks to her and babbles back, but she doesn't seem to follow his gaze like other babies in their playgroup. He thinks about how she seems most interested in things that are close to her face, and he realizes he hasn't really seen her focus on things farther away. He remembers hearing that a child's eye sight takes time to develop, maybe a year or something?
- He isn't sure if this is typical for her age. Her dad wonders, "Is she just taking her time, or could she be having trouble seeing what we're looking at?" He's unsure if this is normal or not, but Maya can't tell him what is going on either, so he decided to bring it up at her next check up, to be safe.
- Knowing your child and understanding developmental milestones can help you recognize potential areas of concern. Children are not likely to tell us their vision is blurry. These children lack the language skills to tell us many things, but even older children aren't likely to mention vision issues. A child is still getting used to their bodies and the world, and may not be aware that something isn't quite right. If you have any concerns about your child's development, consider reaching out to your pediatrician, optometrist, early intervention specialist, or a developmental pediatrician for support and guidance.
- One of the most important things for families to know after a child is diagnosed with vision differences is that you are not alone. In Illinois, we have support through the Illinois Early Learning Project, Illinois Service Resource Center, and the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired, and many more. One of the most important things for families to know after a child is diagnosed with vision differences is that you are not alone. In Illinois, we have support through the Illinois Early Learning Project, Illinois Service Resource Center, and the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired, and many more.

- Here is a link to the Early Years Project resources page
- Passing a vision screening doesn't mean your child's eyesight is perfect or will stay the same forever. It just means no problems were found at that time. If you have any concerns about your child's development, consider reaching out to your pediatrician, optometrist, early intervention specialist, or a developmental pediatrician for support and guidance. Even if your child passes a vision screening, doesn't mean that an issue won't ever arise. Even if your child passes, it's still important to keep an eye on developmental milestones and speak up if new concerns arise. Early action makes a big difference.
- Illinois Hands & Voices is funded in part by the support of Illinois EHDI.
- This project was supported by the Illinois Department of Public Health Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program made possible by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) and Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA).
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The Effects of Vision Differences on Development

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- The Effects of Vision Differences on Development
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- When vision is impaired—whether from birth or later—it can affect many areas of development. Here's how: Language and Communication Development, Social Emotional Learning, Cognitive Development.
- Vision Differences: Impact on Language and Communication
- Means Missing non-verbal cues: Facial expressions, gestures, and lip movements help children understand and develop language. Direct training and support can help support the growth of language and communication skills.
- Vision Differences and Cognitive Development
- Less visual learning: Children with poor vision don't get as much visual information, which can delay learning about shapes, colors, sizes, and how things fit together. Object permanence: They may not realize things still exist when out of sight—like a toy under a blanket—which is key for memory and reasoning. Imitation and pretend play: If a child can't clearly see what others are doing, copying actions or engaging in imaginative play becomes harder.

- Social Skills and Emotions. Some children with vision differences may act in ways that seem unusual because they have a harder time observing and understanding how others behave. Their social skills may develop differently. They may benefit from extra support to understand and express their emotions. Sometimes that means Confidence issues: Struggling with tasks that come easily to others may affect your child's self-esteem—unless they get the support and encouragement they need.
- Some children with vision differences may act in ways that seem unusual because they have a harder time observing and understanding how others behave. Their social skills may develop differently. They may benefit from extra support to understand and express their emotions. Sometimes that means Confidence issues: Struggling with tasks that come easily to others may affect your child's self-esteem—unless they get the support and encouragement they need.
- Knowing what to expect as they grow or referencing that information, can be a big help. Doing activities that support healthy eyes and overall development (playing outside, hand eye coordination, coloring, etc) - for more ideas check out our handout Vision:Fostering Development. watching for signs of problems. keeping up with regular vision checks. Trust your instincts — connecting with a pediatrician or eye doctor can help you get answers and support your child's growth with confidence.
- One of the most important things for families to know after a child is diagnosed with vision differences is that you are not alone. In Illinois, we have support through the Illinois Early Learning Project, Illinois Service Resource Center, and the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired, and many more. One of the most important things for families to know after a child is diagnosed with vision differences is that you are not alone. In Illinois, we have support through the Illinois Early Learning Project, Illinois Service Resource Center, and the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired, and many more.
- Here is a link to the Early Years Project resources page
- Passing a vision screening doesn't mean your child's eyesight is perfect or will stay the same forever. It just means no problems were found at that time. If you have any concerns about your child's development, consider reaching out to your pediatrician, optometrist, early intervention specialist, or a developmental pediatrician for support and guidance. Even if your child passes a vision screening, doesn't mean that an issue won't ever arise. Even if your child passes, it's still important to keep an eye on developmental milestones and speak up if new concerns arise. Early action makes a big difference.
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- Fostering Vision Development
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- Fostering development means helping a child learn, grow, and gain confidence. Vision is a big part of a child's overall development, and influences speech, language, cognitive skills, social interactions, and emotional well-being.
- Fostering development also means other things that we take care of as parents, that may not initially come to mind. Such as: Stay up to date with well child checks and vaccines: Prevents illnesses that can cause hearing loss. Talk, Sing, and Read to Your Baby:
- Enhances language and auditory processing. Encourage the use of sunglasses The earlier you start, the easier it is for children to get used to wearing them. Protects the eyes from damage. More time outdoors may lower a child's risk for myopia (nearsightedness). One study looked at kids spending 40 extra minutes outdoors each day. These kids lowered their risk of getting myopia. I want to mention that spending more time on screens increases their risk of developing nearsightedness. *<https://www.aao.org/eye-health/news/prevent-childhood-myopia-sunshine-outdoors> Encourage Social Interaction: Helps build communication confidence, 3–5 years: Attending an optometry appointment to check on vision development
- For more information about children's vision and development, talk to your pediatrician, check out our introduction video, or go to the Fostering Development handout on our website. scanning the QR code will take you the activities page, where the printer friendly handout is located. Again these activity suggestions vary from one source to another, so use what works best for your child, in your situation.
- A really great way to help your child develop in all areas is through reading. There are reading opportunities through your local community through Little Free Libraries and your local library. Little Free libraries– has an app that makes finding one near you simple. Your local library: not only do they offer many different kid's activity and reading programs for free, but many libraries now have a lot of digital content available to borrow using your library card. You can get the books to your child through a device and save time! Funbrain has free books to read as well math games, you can sort by your child's grade level.
- There are a more reading programs in the summer. Barnes & Noble, Pizza Hut, Chuck E Cheese, Books A Million, Scholastic, Nothing Bundt Cakes. If you are interested in any of these near you, you can learn more about them online.

- This is the All About Vision Series, from The Early Years Project
- Potential Signs of Vision Differences
- We use QR codes to direct you to resources within our videos. How to Use a QR Code in a Video: Pause the video when the QR code appears., Open the camera on your smartphone or tablet., Point the camera at the QR code (like you're taking a picture)., A link will pop up—tap it to open the website, activity, or resource!, If it doesn't work, try holding your device steady or get closer to the screen. How to Use a QR Code from a Screenshot: Take a screenshot of the QR code when it appears in the video, Open your phone's photo gallery and find the screenshot, Tap the image to view it. On most phones, your camera or photo app will automatically detect the QR code and show a link you can tap. Children often can't explain when they're having trouble seeing. Instead, they may show subtle signs that something's off. The behaviors here can indicate a possible vision difference and should not be overlooked: For example... Frequent eye rubbing— Often a sign of eye fatigue or strain. Tilting or turning the head to see— May be a way to compensate for misalignment, a blind spot, or reduced vision in one eye. Seeing words move, double, or blur on the page— Could suggest visual tracking or focusing difficulties. All of these are equally as important in order to recognize a vision difference. Feel free to take a screenshot or refer back to the video if needed.
- Many signs of vision differences in young children can easily be mistaken for other challenges — and may not seem clearly connected to vision at all. For example: Reading below grade level may look like a learning difficulty, but could actually stem from a child struggling to see text clearly or track words across a page. A short attention span or difficulty focusing might be interpreted as a behavioral or developmental issue, when in fact, it could be due to visual fatigue or blurry vision. Coordination issues — such as trouble with hand-eye-body movements — might suggest motor delays, but vision plays a key role in helping children judge space and movement. Avoiding tasks like coloring, puzzles, or homework may be a sign that the child is visually overwhelmed or struggling to keep things in focus. Stress, anxiety, or dizziness can also be reactions to unrecognized visual strain.
- Some eye conditions may need medical attention. If any of the signs are noticed — especially ones like— white pupils, misaligned eyes, or abnormal movements — it's important to refer the child to a pediatric eye specialist promptly. Early identification can protect vision and overall development.
- One of the most important things for families to know after a child is diagnosed with vision differences is that you are not alone. In Illinois, we have support through the Illinois Early Learning Project, Illinois Service Resource Center, and the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired, and many more.

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Vision Matters: Prevalence & Risk Factors

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- Hispanic/Latino children have higher rates of strabismus (struh biz mus) crossed eyes or "wandering eye" and are more affected by vision loss and blindness due to conditions like diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma. Black/African American children are at increased risk for cataracts, glaucoma, and diabetic eye disease. Children living in poverty face a greater chance of untreated vision problems and vision loss due to limited access to care. Premature infants are at higher risk for vision impairment and may need early and ongoing eye exams.

- Other Considerations: Family history, Screen time habits: Extended time on tablets, phones, or TV can strain eyes and affect focus, especially up close—Changes in our lifestyle, less time outside and more time on screens has led to a higher rate of myopia (nearsightedness) in children. Lack of outdoor play: Natural light and distance viewing help eye development — staying indoors too much may increase risk of nearsightedness (myopia). Poor lighting at home or school: Can cause unnecessary eye strain. Limited access to nutritious food: A diet low in vitamins A, C, E, and omega-3s may affect eye health. Exposure to secondhand smoke: Linked to higher risk of some eye conditions in children. Household stress or trauma: Chronic stress can impact focus, behavior, and even physical symptoms like headaches or eye rubbing. Sleep habits: Poor or limited sleep can cause eye fatigue and mimic vision issues. Time spent reading or doing close work without breaks: May cause eye strain or discomfort, especially if there's an unrecognized vision difference.
- Eye injury is the leading cause of blindness in children. Baseball is one of the top sports where children frequently experience eye injuries — especially from balls or bats. Others include: Basketball — elbows, fingers, and fast passes can cause eye trauma. Soccer — collisions and flying balls can lead to eye injuries. Hockey — pucks, sticks, and body contact are common causes.
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- Passing a vision screening doesn't mean your child's eyesight is perfect or will stay the same forever. It just means no problems were found at that time. If you have any concerns about your child's development, consider reaching out to your pediatrician, optometrist, early intervention specialist, or a developmental pediatrician for support and guidance. Even if your child passes a vision screening, doesn't mean that an issue won't ever arise. Even if your child passes, it's still important to keep an eye on developmental milestones and speak up if new concerns arise. Early action makes a big difference.
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- Other Considerations: Family history, Screen time habits: Extended time on tablets, phones, or TV can strain eyes and affect focus, especially up close—Changes in our lifestyle, less time outside and more time on screens has led to a higher rate of myopia (nearsightedness) in children. Lack of outdoor play: Natural light and distance viewing help eye development — staying indoors too much may increase risk of nearsightedness (myopia). Poor lighting at home or school: Can cause unnecessary eye strain. Limited access to nutritious food: A diet low in vitamins A, C, E, and omega-3s may affect eye health. Exposure to secondhand smoke: Linked to higher risk of some eye conditions in children. Household stress or trauma: Chronic stress can impact focus, behavior, and even physical symptoms like headaches or eye rubbing. Sleep habits: Poor or limited sleep can cause eye fatigue and mimic vision issues. Time spent reading or doing close work without breaks: May cause eye strain or discomfort, especially if there's an unrecognized vision difference.
- Eye injury is the leading cause of blindness in children. Baseball is one of the top sports where children frequently experience eye injuries — especially from balls or bats. Others include: Basketball — elbows, fingers, and fast passes can cause eye trauma. Soccer — collisions and flying balls can lead to eye injuries. Hockey — pucks, sticks, and body contact are common causes.
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- This is the All About Vision Series, from The Early Years Project
- Vision Matters: Prevalence & Risk Factors
- We use QR codes to direct you to resources within our videos. How to Use a QR Code in a Video: Pause the video when the QR code appears., Open the camera on your smartphone or tablet., Point the camera at the QR code (like you're taking a picture)., A link will pop up—tap it to open the website, activity, or resource!, If it doesn't work, try holding your device steady or get closer to the screen. How to Use a QR Code from a Screenshot: Take a screenshot of the QR code when it appears in the video, Open your phone's photo gallery and find the screenshot, Tap the image to view it. On most phones, your camera or photo app will automatically detect the QR code and show a link you can tap.
- Equipment at the Eye Doctor's Office: These machines are typically located in a semi private area, and are usually completed with a technician. They may look big or high-tech, but they're completely safe and painless. Each one gives the eye doctor important information to help catch vision problems early and keep your child's eyes healthy.
- This a typical set up of a room where a patient would see the eye doctor.
- Vision screenings are a helpful first step but not a full eye exam. Think of a vision screening like a quiz in school. It's a quick set of questions to check if you know the basics. It's not too detailed, but it gives an idea of how you're doing. A full eye exam is like a big test. It's more thorough and checks everything, making sure you understand all the material and don't miss anything important. A screening only checks for one or two specific eye issues and are meant to show if more testing is needed. The name "vision screening" can be misleading—it sounds like a full check-up, but it's not. For example, we don't just say "cancer screening"—we say breast or skin cancer screening to be more specific. The same should go for vision. Most screenings do not check: How well the eyes focus, How the eyes work together, Color vision. These are some of the most common vision differences in young children and need a full eye exam by an eye care professional to detect.
- Many people assume that if a child passes a vision screening, their eyes are healthy — but research shows this often isn't the case. In fact, 73 out of 100 children who pass a routine screening (such as the E chart) may still fail a comprehensive eye exam. Another study found that the vision screening missed over 75% of children with farsightedness or problems with eye coordination and tracking. Screenings, while helpful, are limited. They are designed to flag concerns, not diagnose them. One of the most important things for families to know after a child is diagnosed with vision differences is that you are not alone. In Illinois, we have support through the Illinois Early Learning Project, Illinois Service Resource Center, and the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired, and many more.
- What is an eye exam? An eye exam is more formally known as, a comprehensive eye exam, is made up of many smaller tests that each check something different about your child's eyes.
- There are 9 common types of Vision Tests:
- Most of which are pretty common for children to complete. Visual Acuity Test, Refraction Test, Eye Movement Test (Ocular Motility), Pupil Response Test, Binocular Vision Test, Depth Perception Test, Color Vision Test, Eye Health Exam.

- Make an eye exam a positive experience. Between the ages of 3 and 5, children should have a comprehensive eye exam by an optometrist to make sure their vision is developing properly and to check for any signs of eye disease. Early detection is key to supporting learning, development, and confidence.
- Make an Eye Exam a Positive Experience: Schedule the appointment early in the day when your child is well-rested and alert. Arrive early to leave any additional stressors at home. Make sure to have enough time for paperwork, and maybe showing the child around the waiting room. Talk to the child ahead of time about what to expect — keep it simple and reassuring, maybe even act it out ahead of time. Describe the equipment in kid-friendly ways, like saying, “The eye chart is like a puzzle” or “The doctor will use a special flashlight to look at your superhero eyes.” [verywellhealth.com](https://www.verywellhealth.com) Allow them to bring a comfort item. Having a special toy there can make all the difference, especially if it has a face. The doctor can do an eye test on teddy first to show the child that it is safe. Reward system, bribery every once in a while is totally fine: doing a good job can earn them a treat, trip to the library, or a favorite spot like the park. A fun, relaxed approach can help your child feel comfortable and even excited for their eye check!
- Visual Acuity Test: What it does: Checks how clearly a child sees things far away or up close. What it’s like: The child reads letters, shapes, or pictures from a chart (like the big “E” chart).
- Refraction Test: What it does: Finds out if your child needs glasses and what kind. What it’s like: The child looks through a machine while the doctor switches lenses and asks, “Which is better—1 or 2?”
- Eye Alignment & Movement Test (Ocular Motility) What it does: Checks how well the eyes move and work together. What it’s like: The child follows a light or toy with their eyes (without moving their head).
- Binocular Vision Test: What it does: Makes sure both eyes work together to focus. What it’s like: usually the child will participate in a “cover/uncover” test as pictured here. it could also be – The child may wear special glasses and look at pictures or patterns that appear in 3D.
- Color Vision Test: What it does: Checks if your child can tell colors apart. What it’s like: The child looks at pictures made of colored dots and tries to spot shapes or numbers.
- Depth Perception Test: What it does: Checks how well your child sees distance and space. What it’s like: The child might be asked to look at 3D images with special glasses or grab objects that seem closer or farther away.
- Pupil Response & Eye Health Check: What it does: Checks if the eyes respond normally to light and if the inside of the eye is healthy. What it’s like: A light is gently shined in the eyes, and sometimes drops are used to see inside better.
- A Quick Note on Eye Exams for babies and toddlers: The tests may look different for younger babies/toddlers. Here are some pictures that show a little bit of a difference.
- This QR code takes you to a video that walks you through an eye exam on a baby. What I noticed in watching the video, is the eye doctor's ability to adapt and interact with the baby.
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The Eye Diagnosis

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- Categories of eye concerns: Vision- refractive and non refractive. Refractive is when a prescription can provide better vision, and non refractive, where it doesn't but an example would be an issue with the eyes communicating to the brain. Refractive and medical are the most common types of concerns in children, but there are non refractive issues ,that we should be aware of as well.
- Refractive errors such as nearsightedness, farsightedness, and astigmatism. are the most frequent eye issues among children and can often be corrected with glasses or contact lenses. BINOCULAR VISION DISORDERS - eyes aren't working as a team. Strabismus struh-BIZ-muss (crossed eyes) Eyes are misaligned - and not looking at the same place at the same time. Convergence Insufficiency-eyes don't work together while focusing on nearby objects. Amblyopia AM-blee-OH-pee-uh (Lazy Eye) One eye has reduced vision, and isn't moving with other one, appearing "lazy" Can last into adulthood if not treated early. I want to take a moment to share a graphic on binocular vision disorders,
- I thought this was a nice representation of what these can look like.

The Eye Diagnosis

- Common Medical Eye Conditions in Children
- 1. Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye) What it is: Inflammation of the conjunctiva, leading to redness, tearing, and discharge. Prevalence: Bacterial conjunctivitis accounts for over 50% of cases in children. 2. Clogged Tear Duct (Nasolacrimal Duct Obstruction) What it is: Blockage in the tear drainage system, causing watery eyes and potential discharge. Prevalence: Affects up to 20% of newborns, often resolving without intervention. 3. Sty (Hordeolum)
- What it is: A red, tender bump on the eyelid caused by a bacterial infection of an oil gland. Treatment: Typically resolves with warm compresses; antibiotics may be needed if persistent. 4. Blepharitis BLEF-uh-rye-tis
- What it is: Chronic inflammation of the eyelid margins, leading to redness, irritation, and crusting. Management: Requires regular eyelid hygiene and, in some cases, antibiotic therapy. 5. Chalazion shuh-LAY-zee-uhn What it is: A painless lump on the eyelid resulting from a blocked oil gland. Prevalence: Observed in approximately 2% of children, with higher rates in certain ethnic groups. 6. Periorbital (Preseptal) per-ee-OR-bih-tuhl (pree-SEP-tuhl) Cellulitis What it is: Infection of the eyelid and surrounding skin, causing redness and swelling. Prevalence: More common in children than adults; requires prompt antibiotic treatment. 7. Corneal Abrasion What it is: A scratch on the eye's surface, leading to pain, redness, and light sensitivity. Prevalence: A common eye injury in children, often resulting from minor trauma.
- Non refractive errors: Visual Processing Disorders. These involve difficulty interpreting visual information, even when vision is normal. Children may struggle with tasks like reading, writing, or understanding spatial relationships. Cataracts Congenital (present at birth,) or Pediatric (comes on later in childhood) clouding of the eye's lens. It's not all that common, however, I did want to bring it up because it can lead to significant visual impairment if not treated quickly. Causes of Pediatric Cataracts: Trauma, Diabetes, Poisoning, Steroid use, Other childhood diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, Complications from other eye diseases, such as glaucoma, Glaucoma Pediatric/Congenital. Rare eye condition where pressure builds up inside a child's eye, damaging the optic nerve (the part that sends visual information to the brain). This can lead to vision loss if not treated early.
- Here are some pictures to show what some of the medical eye conditions look like.
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