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POSTURE and VISION

Posture can be important in learning and poor posture over time can lead to physical stress in the body, resulting in visual problems. Also visual problems can cause the body to adopt a poor posture.

Stress reduces the ability to learn.

Many schools make the task of copying or learning from the blackboard more difficult by having children sitting side on or with their backs to the blackboard. This is especially important in the early years of learning.

A child, already having problems maintaining a mental picture, has then to mentally manipulate it through 90 or 180 degrees before writing down the work from the blackboard.

The best distance for a child or an adult to work at or read is the distance from the elbow to the fist. This distance increases as the child grows and ranges from 30 to 40 cm in an adult.

Uncorrected habitual bad posture into the early teens may cause body symmetry problems, so it is important that parents and teachers insist on good posture.

What can parents do?

- Be aware of the role of vision and the symptoms of visual difficulties, rather than being lulled into complacency by an eye check carried out at school at six metres that says the sight is normal.
- Be vigilant of posture and doing everything possible to see your child maintains a good position when reading and writing. Reading in bed requires the child to sit up with extra pillows or the book creeps closer and closer to the eyes.
- Provide a good study area with a desk sloped at 10 degrees and good incandescent lighting. Fluorescent lighting should be avoided because it is more stressful.
- Make sure an eye examination is carried out by someone who also tests for visual function at the near working distance.
- Provide and play games that demand visual memory and creativity, while avoiding toys that require only the ability to turn on a switch.
- Give time for the child to describe what has happened during the day. If this is difficult to start with, before school set a topic that has to be talked about after school.

How can teachers help?

- Be aware of the role of vision and the symptoms of visual difficulties; and when appropriate, recommend that parents see a behavioural optometrist -- that is someone who takes a holistic approach to vision.
- Have the child face the blackboard.
- Supervise their posture and correct pen hold.
- Use the blackboard for teaching as much as possible. This enables children who have visual stress at near to learn without stress from the board.
- Make sure the print is clear when printed sheets are used for teaching, and that the time spent working with these sheets is kept to a minimum.

Optometrists can play a major role by advising parents and teachers of these