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Vision and visual processing in autistic spectrum disorders

There is an assumption made by most people that we all essentially see the same. This is not true – in fact we all see differently. And visual performance is of extraordinary importance for a high proportion of those on the spectrum. At our specialist optical practice in Ayr (Scotland) we routinely address some of the most complex visual processing problems found in autistic spectrum disorders and their consequences.

The things that we address may be categorised into primary visual problems, mixed visual problems and synesthetic effects.

We do not use drugs in our eye examinations unless there is a very good reason as ASD children often respond differently. We do all the normal refractive assessments – but there is a very high incidence of binocular vision problems and we address these too.

More important in ASD, we address and treat conditions such as prosopagnosia (face recognition problems), metamorphopsia (unstable vision), temporal processing difficulties such as the McGurk effect (sound / vision desynchronisation), The Pulfrich effect (when visual space is unstable), feedback difficulties (causes problems such as dyspraxia), dorsal stream difficulties (flicker, edge and movement problems).

Pain, discomfort, smell, touch, taste, swallow, gait, posture, hearing (and auditory processing) will also be addressed. Synesthesia is common in ASD – but rarely addressed. And this is just the start.. The results vary depending on presentation (we are happy to see non verbal / non cooperative children) and we work closely with parents to achieve optimum results. When possible we also try and make the autistic person responsible ie they have the choice within assessments and whether interventions are appropriate eg we could change the vision of an artist – but they would not then be able to pursue their career.

So, what should a parent / person on the spectrum do?

In the case of a parent it is essential that you consult a professional to ascertain whether your child has a visual processing problem. All children on the spectrum should be assessed. A simple eye test is not sufficient and it is very important that you see a specialist in this area – we have one of the few practices in the country that can deal with the most complex cases. In the case of an adult they are welcome at our practice too. Both children and adults enjoy the tests (the chocolate test is a particular favourite for children). Total costs run from nil to a maximum of £125 in our practice (unless a report is necessary – they can be expensive if written for legal reasons). Don't be put off by costs – it is rarely more than £100 in total. We also can use hypnosis, auditory processing interventions and other more specialised techniques but these are rarely appropriate.

For more info www.jordanseyes.com

A big thank you to Ian Jordan for taking the time to write that for us all.