

Vision Screening Referrals



Head Start programs are required to do evidence-based vision screening. If you find a possible vision issue during the screening, it's important to make sure the child gets the care they need. This resource helps support staff and families in taking the right steps toward a referral to an eye specialist.

Understanding Vision Referrals.

Why should you refer a child? Sometimes during vision screenings, the results mean more information is needed. A referral is a recommendation that the child see a vision specialist for a more detailed exam.

Refer a child if:

- A child struggles with recognizing optotypes (letters, shapes, or pictures) during screenings
- There's a difference in how well each eye sees
- The child has headaches often, has eye discomfort, or has trouble focusing their eyes
- Staff or family members have any concerns about the child's vision

Steps to Take When Referring a Child

Follow these steps when referring a child after a vision screening:

1. Give vision screening results to families.

- Schedule a meeting with the family to explain and discuss the screening results.
- Remind the family that screenings only tell us that there could be a problem and another exam is needed. Mention that untreated vision issues can affect learning and behavior in the classroom.
- Share simple, accurate information about vision referrals that can help the family decide what to do next.
- Use different ways to share results (e.g., text messages, letters, in person). Make sure communications are in the family's preferred language.
- Encourage families to ask questions and let them know it's OK to contact you with questions.

2. Give information about specialists.

- After clearly explaining the results, explain the importance of a specialist visit.
- Keep an updated list of local vision specialists that families can use.
- Give information about insurance accepted by the specialists, languages they speak, hours of operation, and contact details.

3. Support families.

- Ask the family if they would like help to schedule and attend the referral visit.
- Offer support, such as scheduling the eye exam or finding transportation solutions.
- Answer questions about next steps and any other concerns they have.

4. Follow up.

- Check in regularly with the family. After two to four weeks, find out if the family had difficulty scheduling the eye exam.
- If they haven't scheduled an appointment, find out how you can help them.
- When the family has scheduled the appointment, write down the time of the appointment and the name of the specialist.
- Ask if they need help going to or paying for the appointment.

5. Track progress.

- Support the family in making sure the child attends the eye exam visit. If needed, create a Family Partnership Agreement with small, achievable steps and completion dates.
- Send the family a reminder of the appointment.
- Pay for a ride-share service, taxi, bus, or other public transportation. Look for possible rides in this Transportation Services Directory.
- If the family needs financial help, ask about VSP gift certificates or OneSight referral cards from Prevent Blindness by calling (toll-free) 800-331-2020.



Preparing for the Eye Exam

Here is how you can keep families informed on what to expect during the visit.

Understand the process.

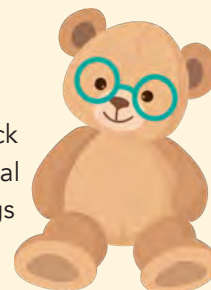
Watch and share videos, including [Your Child's Eye Exam](#) and [What to Expect at the Pediatric Ophthalmologist](#), with families to help ease stress or anxiety about the visit.

Encourage questions.

Share resources to help families think about questions to ask. A list of [questions to ask the eye doctor](#) can be helpful. Remind families it's OK to keep asking questions until they fully understand any diagnosis and recommended treatment. Encourage families to also share screening results with the doctor.

Suggest they pack a snack and comfort items.

Bringing the child's favorite snack and a book, toy, or stuffed animal to the eye exam can make things go a little more smoothly.



Support families after the visit.

Offer to help with paperwork or communication between the Head Start program and the specialist. Ask families for updates and any news of the visit.

Referring a child to a vision specialist puts the child one step closer to getting the help they need. Communication and support for both the family and the child are important for a successful referral and why you are here: to support families every step of the way.



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May 2024