

Is Behavioural Optometry Legitimate and Based on Science?

What is Behavioural Optometry?

Behavioural (or developmental) optometry is a branch of optometry focusing on how the eyes and brain work together, particularly looking at visual processing, tracking, and how vision affects learning and behaviour in children.

Practitioners often claim to treat:

- Reading difficulties
- Dyslexia
- Attention problems
- Learning challenges
- Poor eye tracking or convergence

They may use **vision therapy**, coloured lenses, or eye exercises as part of their approach.

What Does the Science Say?

- **Eye conditions like strabismus (eye turns) and convergence insufficiency** can benefit from certain vision therapies, with evidence supporting targeted treatments for these specific conditions.
 - However, for **dyslexia, ADHD, and learning disabilities**, the **evidence does not support behavioural optometry or vision therapy as effective treatments**.
 - Large, well-conducted studies and systematic reviews consistently find that learning difficulties and ADHD are **not caused by visual problems**, and treating the eyes does not resolve these difficulties.
 - The **causes of reading and attention difficulties are primarily neurological and cognitive**, not visual, even if some children may also have co-occurring visual challenges.
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Does the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) Endorse Behavioural Optometry?

No. The **AAO, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus (AAPOS)** have **explicitly stated**:

- ✓ There is **no scientific evidence** that vision therapy improves learning, dyslexia, or ADHD.
 - ✓ Vision therapy **should not replace evidence-based educational or medical interventions** for these conditions.
 - ✓ Parents should be cautious about spending time and money on vision therapies for learning and attention problems unless there is a clear eye health need diagnosed by an ophthalmologist or optometrist using evidence-based practices.
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Summary for Parents

- **Behavioural optometry may help certain eye coordination problems** like convergence insufficiency but does **not treat ADHD, dyslexia, or learning difficulties**.
 - Be cautious of claims suggesting vision therapy can cure reading difficulties or ADHD.
 - If you suspect vision issues, it is appropriate to **see a qualified optometrist or ophthalmologist**, but for learning and behavioural challenges, it is best to pursue **evidence-based educational, psychological, and medical assessments and interventions**.
 - If you are considering vision therapy for your child, ask:
 - What specific condition is being treated?
 - What is the scientific evidence?
 - How will progress be measured?
 - How does this integrate with other interventions (e.g., OT, speech therapy, tutoring)?
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Bottom Line

- ✓ Behavioural optometry is **not endorsed by major medical bodies for treating learning or behavioural difficulties**.
- ✓ It may help certain eye coordination problems when appropriately indicated.
- ✓ For ADHD and learning difficulties, follow **evidence-based interventions and assessments with your paediatrician, psychologist, and educational professionals**.