

# READY FOR SCHOOL



## Dear Educator:

Good vision is a critical factor in a child's growth, development, and academic progress since so much of what is learned comes through one's vision. Visual problems can affect a child's ability to clearly identify letters, words, and numbers, or transfer information from chalkboard to paper. Physical problems such as eye-hand-body coordination as well as social, discipline, and emotional problems can also be symptoms of poor vision.

The American Optometric Association presents you with this free **Ready for School** educational program to help educate parents about the importance of eye exams for young children and to help make eye exams for youngsters a positive experience. It is recommended that children have an eye exam by the age of three. Detecting visual problems early can make a difference in how children perform in school both academically and socially.

According to the National Parent Teacher Association, an estimated ten million children suffer from vision problems. One in twenty preschoolers and one in four school-age children fall into this category. Undetected and untreated vision problems can keep children from reaching their learning potential and even cause them to be diagnosed as problem learners. Some 60 percent of children diagnosed as problem learners have undetected vision problems.

The growing popularity of 3-D movies, television, and video games has also focused attention on children's vision problems as well. The American Optometric Association estimates that some three to nine million people have binocular vision problems that affect their ability to watch 3-D movies. Children who experience eyestrain, headaches, nausea, or dizziness during or after viewing a 3-D movie are prime candidates for a professional examination.

Having an eye exam should be part of getting young children ready for school. The vision screenings often conducted in schools or pediatricians' offices are not

enough. These screenings only test range of vision. They cannot provide a detailed evaluation of visual function. For example, the Snellen chart only measures the letters and numbers a child can read at 20 feet. It doesn't reveal how a child sees and processes print on a page or on a computer screen.

An optometrist has the equipment and training to thoroughly examine a child for good vision, including visual acuity, eye health, and visual skills. Measuring acuity – the way the eye sees things both near and far – can determine whether or not glasses are needed. Checking the health of the eye during the early years is important as untreated diseases of the eye can impair vision or lead to loss of vision. Visual skills make a difference to learning as well. It's important to test for the ability of the eyes to work together, for their ability to focus and shift focus from near to distant points, and for their ability to move together across a page of print, to directly view an object, and to move from one area to another.

Help youngsters in your program get a good start in school. Inform parents about the importance of eye exams at an early age by providing them with a copy of the parent letter included in this guide. Help make a visit to the optometrist a positive experience for children by completing the student activity sheet with them.

We encourage you to share this educational packet with other early childhood educators. Although the materials are copyrighted, you have permission to make as many copies as needed for educational purposes.

We hope you and your children have a wonderful year.

Sincerely,

**Dr. Dominic Kinsley**  
*Editor in Chief*  
*Young Minds Inspired*

**Dori Carlson, OD**  
*President*  
*American Optometric Association*

# READY FOR SCHOOL



## Dear Parent,

Getting your child ready for school is a busy and exciting time. You've most likely bought new clothes and sneakers, taken your child for a physical exam, and talked to your child about the upcoming event – all important steps to making your child's school experience rewarding. But did you include an eye exam as part of your child's preparation for school?

The National PTA estimates ten million children suffer from visual problems. Because vision is such an important part of the learning process, classroom success may be difficult for children to achieve if a vision problem is not detected or treated. Some 60 percent of children diagnosed as problem learners have undetected vision problems.

In fact, if your child has complained of eyestrain, headaches, nausea, or dizziness during or after viewing a 3-D movie, he or she may have an undiagnosed eye condition. According to the American Optometric Association, anywhere from three to nine million people have problems with binocular vision that affect their ability to watch 3-D TV and movies.

The good news is that early diagnosis of a visual problem and early treatment usually mean a good prognosis. Did you know that the optimal time for your child's first eye exam is as early as six months of age? At this age, the visual system is developed enough for an optometrist to identify risk factors that may have adverse effects on eye and vision health – and ultimately a child's ability to learn.

The vision screenings done at school or as part of a physical are meant only to measure a child's range of vision. They can't detect conditions that may affect

visual function, and are difficult to do with children under the age of four. An optometrist has the equipment and training to give your child a comprehensive evaluation. The exam evaluates the eye's ability to see at several distances such as the board, a book, or a computer screen. It tests the eyes' ability to shift focus from one point to another, to follow words on a page, and to recognize colors accurately. The exam also checks a child's eye-hand coordination and eye health.

We encourage you to make your child's first experiences with school positive and rewarding by arranging for an eye exam by an optometrist. Through InfantSEE®, a public health program, optometrists provide a comprehensive eye and vision assessment to infants between the ages of 6 and 12 months at no cost regardless of income or ability to pay. To find an InfantSEE® provider in your area, please visit [www.infantsee.org](http://www.infantsee.org).

Including an eye examination in infancy and again before a child starts school allows you to celebrate your child's good health and eyesight, or address any detected problems early for his or her best success in school. For more information about eye exams for young children, visit the American Optometric Association website at [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org).

Sincerely,

**Dr. Dominic Kinsley**  
*Editor in Chief*  
*Young Minds Inspired*

**Dori Carlson, OD**  
*President*  
*American Optometric Association*

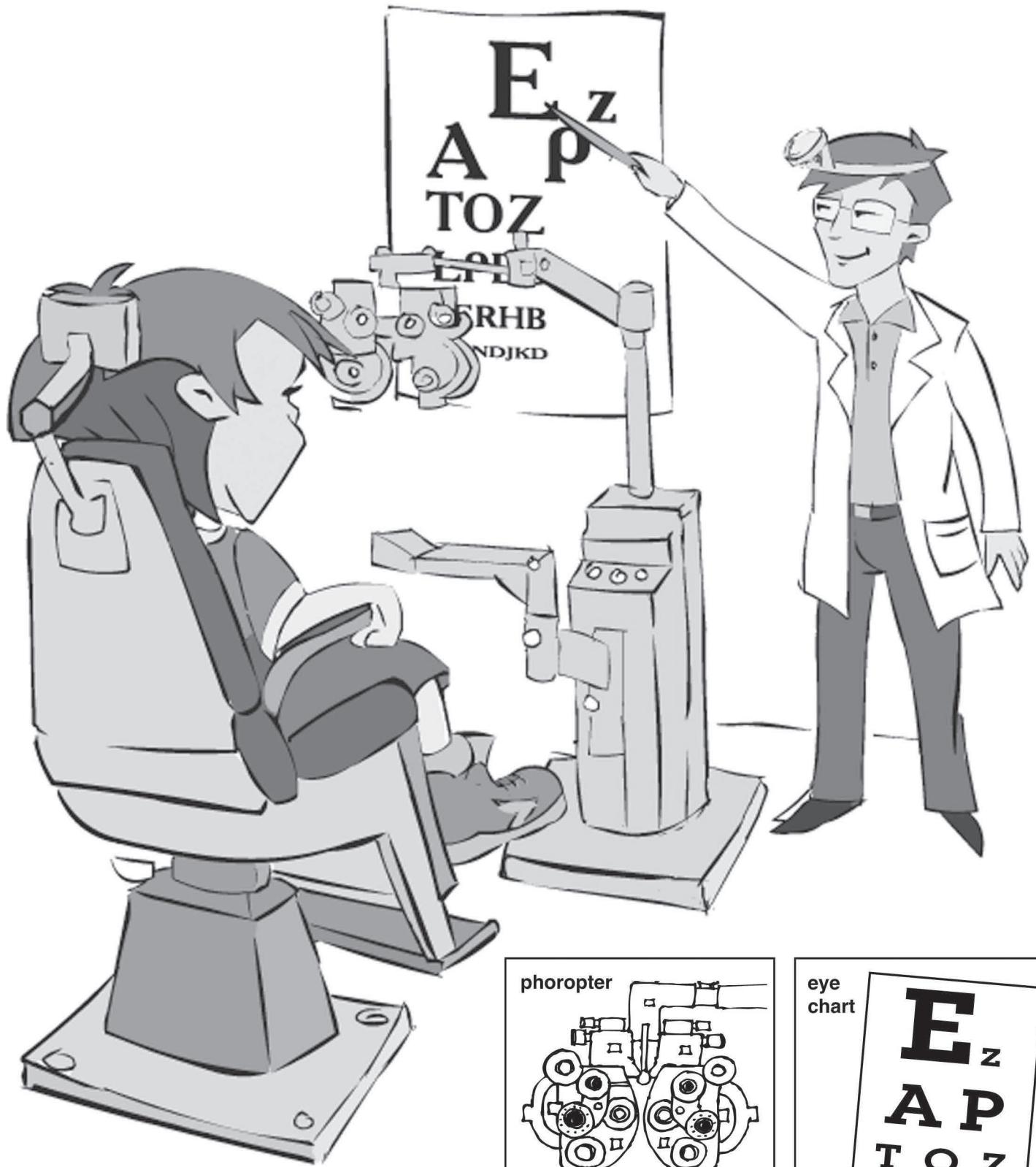


American Optometric Association

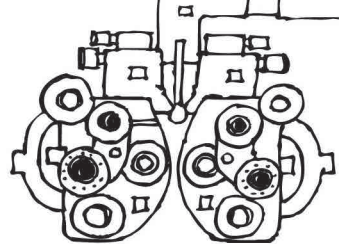


# MEET THE OPTOMETRIST!

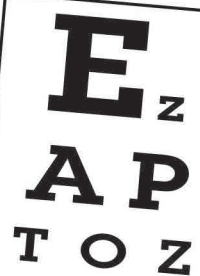
Reproducible  
Activity Sheet



phoropter



eye  
chart



# READY FOR SCHOOL

## How to Use This Program

1. Photocopy the activity sheet to provide a copy for each child in your program. Make a master copy of the complete program to share with other early childhood educators.
2. Photocopy the parent letter so that each child has a copy to take home. Send the letter home along with the completed student activity that introduces children to the optometrist.
3. Visit the Teacher's Center under AOA Communications Center on the American Optometric Association website at [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org) for more teacher information and student activities.
4. Complete and return the enclosed teacher response card. Your input is important to us as we continue to develop educational programs.

## Presenting the Student Activity

Set the stage for this activity by helping children realize how much they use their eyes to learn and to do things. You might use a simple example such as having children close their eyes as they try to throw a bean bag into a basket or circle. Then show them a drawing or other paperwork on the

overhead that is out of focus. Talk about the difficulty they had in doing things when they could not see clearly. Ask them if they have had any problems when they watched a 3-D movie.

Explain that it is important to have eye exams to be sure their eyes are working the way they should. Pass out the activity sheet and tell children that they are going to meet an optometrist, a person who is trained to check eyes.

Talk about the people and the items in the picture, who the people are and how the optometrist uses the equipment to check a person's eyes. Then have children match the items in the boxes to the ones in the picture.

Encourage children to share their activity sheet with their parents, telling them about the new word they learned (optometrist) and what that person does. Be sure to send home the parent letter that explains the importance of eye exams at an early age.

## Follow-Up Activities

1. Reinforce for children how often they use their eyes throughout the day. Play an "I see" game in which you say: I see something round with numbers on it (clock). Children then

point to and name the clock. Continue the game with other items in the classroom.

2. Encourage children to tell you how many ways they use their eyes. You might make a list of them on the chalkboard or easel paper. Some things children might mention are: watching TV, using the computer, reading a book, coloring, throwing and catching a ball. Guide the discussion so that a variety of activities are included.
3. Talk with children about other health care professionals who take care of them. Ask children to name some of them. Answers should include doctor, nurse, and dentist. Then have children draw pictures of each one. Be sure they include the tools used by these professionals. Then label the pictures (e.g. optometrist, pediatrician, nurse), and staple into a booklet to take home.

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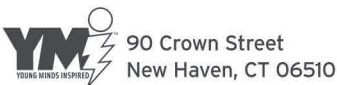


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