# Autism – A visible difference

March 6, 2015 by [Stella Waterhouse](http://www.autismdailynewscast.com/author/stellawaterhouse/)

Vision accounts for over 70% of the information we receive about the world and is extremely important to learning.  Unfortunately though many children with ASD suffer from specific visual problems (which are not generally identified in an ordinary eye test).  These are similar to the problems found in visual dyslexia (also known as Irlen syndrome) but are far more severe.

Unfortunately, despite having wide ranging effects so that, quite literally, *the child* ***does not see*** *what you see*, such problems frequently remain undiagnosed: leading to anxiety, frustration and poor self-esteem.

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These visual problems include a range of focusing anomalies so that the child may not be able to coordinate his eyes properly or has a ‘wandering’ eye or a squint. He may also have poor visual acuity or photo-phobia (which is simply a physical ‘over-reaction’ to glare, brightness or fluorescence) that is outside his control.

The effects are individual but when mild to moderate can include clumsiness and poor writing; as well as headaches or migraine when under bright or fluorescent lights.  Reading can also be problematic as the child may see a variety of visual distortions so that it looks as if the letters are moving or jumping off the page while one sentence may suddenly look like two.  Such problems are not always obvious to in the early years when books have large, well-spaced, print but as the child progresses through school, the print and the spaces between the lines decrease in size, making it harder for him to read clearly.

For many children with ASD the severity of the problems also means that they may experience a variety of effects that could include:

\* problems judging differences in height or width – which are often particularly noticeable when he steps off a curb or over a threshold.

\* difficulty following moving objects – so he may not see an approaching car until it is very close.

\* double vision; seeing two separate images at the same time.

\* fragmented vision – so that faces may seem distorted and all he sees clearly may be an eye, a mouth or an earring.

\* a confused perception of space and size – with objects changing size or shape at times.

\* some things may seem magnified – one child saw a hair as if it were a strand of spaghetti – which  can lead to a fascination with tiny things and make him good at doing intricate tasks

Any child who sees in this way is actually only partially-sighted; living in a world where nothing is quite as it seems, nothing is constant; where other people (and objects) can, at times, appear to be extremely frightening.  Even so there are several ways in which you can alleviate the worst of these effects.

***Top Tips***

\* Encourage him – or her – to wear sunglasses/tinted lenses\*\* or a peaked cap to minimize the effect of bright sunlight, glare and fluorescent lights.  Explain the reasons for this to his teachers so that they realize the benefits.

\* Fluorescent lighting and bright lights can aggravate visual problems so eliminate fluorescent lights, use up-lighters etc.

\* Minimize obstacles for him and don’t rearrange furniture, etc., as this could confuse him.

\* Help him to find things easily by using dark or brightly colored items in the house.

\* Use coloured towels and a different colored toilet paper for easy identification.

\* Color bath water, as some children have difficulty seeing things that are clear, especially under bright lights, but be careful if adding anything smelly as that could cause problems too.

\* Used toys designed for children with visual impairments.

\*\***Tinted lenses**.  The right lenses can help correct some of the visual anomalies, leading to number of benefits which can include better eye tracking and depth perception; a reduction in confusion and hyperactivity alongside improvements in the ability to concentrate, learn and remember things; improved behavior and increased confidence, sociability and communication.  Some professionals remain dubious of these but I have validated them through personal experience of mild visual problems.

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Meanwhile one aspect of the visual effects still remains, so do join me next time to explore face-blindness.