



VISION&LEARNINGNEWS

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Evergreen Vision and Learning Center

Does Your Child Love to Read?

Dan Hock is a primary care optometrist who specializes in developmental optometry. He is a native of Evergreen who feels privileged to practice in the community in which he was raised. Please call 303.674.4143 to schedule an appointment or visit evandlc.com for more information.

Maggie was a vision therapy patient who was successfully working towards fixing her double vision while reading. Yet it was no surprise when upset and sulky, she announced, “I really hate school, teachers and especially reading books!” We had completed a thorough evaluation of all the visual skills required for learning and reading and had also performed a reading assessment. We knew that Maggie’s problems went deeper than her initial diagnosis of convergence insufficiency and double vision when reading. The reading

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assessment had shown that she had low comprehension and fluency, and in sixth grade, she was reading at a fourth grade level.

Our experience has shown that many of the children who are treated by optometric vision therapy excel as readers and develop a love for reading that astounds their parents and teachers, but we have also seen children who have basic reading issues, which can be resolved once the vision problem is corrected. The basic reading issues are a direct result of

delayed development caused by their visual difficulties. Quite often, this manifests itself as a child’s dislike of reading.

After initially treating a few cases that were similar to Maggie’s, I recognized that to complete our mission to help these children, we needed a skilled reading specialist who could help the struggling student—vision issues or not. I wanted to surround myself with a team of professionals, so we could offer individually specific treatments for a variety of reading and learning issues.

Unfortunately, Maggie’s case is not rare. I find that especially in older children who have struggled for years, when one problem is fixed, other problems surface. This is why I immersed myself in finding a way to combine vision therapy services with reading and learning enhancement. I began by studying educational textbooks on reading disabilities. Soon, I learned the importance of phonemic awareness, which is the building block for developing the next phases of reading.

In order to expand my team and knowledge of reading problems, I recruited the help of Donna Hanisch, MA. Donna is a retired Jefferson county teacher who has her masters as a reading specialist, has taught in our mountain community for the past 25 years and is currently heading our reading and tutoring department. She helped us develop our reading assessment through a standardized

testing process. She utilizes the DIBLES test results in her evaluations so that she can communicate with teachers in their own language. This allows her to offer individually specific reading enrichment programs.

Donna began to work with Maggie by addressing some skills such as re-learning basic phonics and syllabication. She also used dictionary skills, which help students figure out how to break down words, and helps them sound them out. All of these proficiencies are then used as building blocks to assist the student in reading more difficult words in context and then graduating to a higher understanding of what they are reading.

In working with Donna, I learned that higher-level comprehension skills can be taught, and as comprehension acquisition increases, the student begins to see that reading is important as well as fun. Additionally, improved reading confidence can be rebuilt, which is valuable to students because they are aware when they are not reading at the same level as their classmates.

Most importantly, Maggie became one of our success stories. Donna loved watching her develop and grow, “My heart ached for Maggie when we first met. But we worked hard over the summer, and I saw her fluency improve, and we were able to attack more difficult comprehension skills. My biggest thrill was watching her two weeks after school started this fall. Her excitement lit up the room, and she reported that she was loving school and she had been volunteering to read out loud to the surprise of her teachers! She had even purchased a difficult book to begin

reading on her own. She was beaming and proud. We still have some work to complete, but what a joy to see a child who now values the great gift of reading.”

Donna’s passion is helping the struggling student. Our learning center offered several book clubs and a math camp this past summer, “It was so exciting to watch the campers giggle with delight as they learned fun ways to remember their math facts. And several of the girls attending one of the book clubs begged to do another one this fall.”

Donna wants all parents to know the warning signs that help is needed:

1. A dislike of reading, but enjoys books when you read to them.
2. Going from book to book and not finding a book they enjoy.
3. Picking a book that is too difficult; the five-word rule applies—if they miss five words on one page, the book is too difficult for them to read at this time.
4. When reading with your student, they are unable to read for an age appropriate amount of time before becoming fatigued.

It is our mission at the Evergreen Vision and Learning Center to not only reach out to students with vision problems, but to all struggling readers. If you know of a struggling student, please call to set up an eye examination to rule out vision as a cause. If all is well there, we can order a reading assessment and offer solutions that can result in a love of learning. There’s nothing better than that!