

When to Refer: Developmental Optometry After Concussion

Referral criteria and handoff notes · for OTs, TVIs, nurses, and 504/IEP teams

Why a developmental optometry referral matters

A standard pediatric eye exam confirms clear sight (acuity and refraction). It does not fully evaluate the binocular, accommodative, and oculomotor systems most commonly disrupted after concussion. Persistent post-concussion vision symptoms usually live in that gap.

Refer when ANY of these persist past the medical provider's expected recovery window

- ☐ Words that blur, double, or 'jump' during near work
- ☐ Convergence insufficiency signs (eye pulling, near-point discomfort, avoidance of reading)
- ☐ Slow, effortful, or inaccurate tracking or copying from the board
- ☐ Accommodative complaints - trouble shifting focus between near and far
- ☐ Photosensitivity that limits classroom participation
- ☐ Visual-vestibular mismatch: dizziness, nausea, or imbalance in busy visual environments
- ☐ Handwriting or fine-motor drop attributed by team to visual demand
- ☐ Return-to-learn plateau despite appropriate accommodations

Refer sooner (do not wait) when

- Symptoms are severe enough to prevent full school day attendance at 2-3 weeks.
- Student is a competitive athlete needing safe return-to-play planning.
- Prior history of concussion, learning difference, or binocular vision diagnosis.
- Family reports pre-existing reading or visual struggles that are now worse.

How to find a developmental optometrist

- COVD Doctor Locator - covid.org (search 'Find a Doctor')
- OEP Foundation - oepf.org
- Ask the medical provider for a preferred neuro-optometric colleague.
- For pediatric concussion clinics: ask which optometrist they refer to for vision therapy.

What to include in the referral packet

- ☐ Date and mechanism of injury; medical provider name and contact
- ☐ Current concussion symptoms and duration
- ☐ School observations (teacher notes, OT/TVI notes, nurse log)
- ☐ Current return-to-learn plan and accommodations in place
- ☐ Prior eye exam records if available
- ☐ Parent contact info and preferred scheduling window

Handoff notes to include (sample language)

'Student sustained a concussion on [date]. Persistent post-concussion symptoms include [list]. School OT and nurse observe [list]. Current 504/return-to-learn plan is in place. Requesting evaluation of binocular vision, accommodation, and oculomotor function to guide school accommodations and possible vision therapy.'

After the referral

- Request the evaluation summary and any recommended accommodations in writing.
- Update the return-to-learn plan and 504/IEP to reflect optometry recommendations.
- Coordinate any prescribed vision therapy with the school schedule.
- Re-screen at 6-8 weeks; document functional change.

Referral decisions are made by the medical team; this document supports the conversation.

Developmental (behavioral) optometrists complete residency training beyond a general eye exam and evaluate binocular vision, accommodation, oculomotor control, and visual processing.