

Teaching children lens handling

Q Does the panel have any communication tips for teaching children how to handle, apply and remove their lenses?

A Sarah Morgan replies: In many ways, the approach to teaching children how to apply and remove their lenses does not differ substantially from teaching an adult. One big benefit with teaching a child is that they are used to receiving instruction from people in authority, for example their teachers, so are very receptive to learning.

When a child first learns to handle contact lenses, it is probably best to develop those skills during a school holiday period. This means they can readily contact the practice or return for follow-up visits as needed without the constraints of the school timetable.

Staff of all ages can teach a child about handling contact lenses if they enjoy talking to children. An older member of staff may have the air of a grandparent, so the child will trust them. Someone who is a parent will have a good idea of what children are capable of and how best to talk to a child. A more junior member of staff may also do very well because they are 'cool' or look fashionable to the child, relative to their parents!

Having a logical checklist to hand is always helpful, and the child can tick off the various steps to mark their progress and understanding during

Q&A
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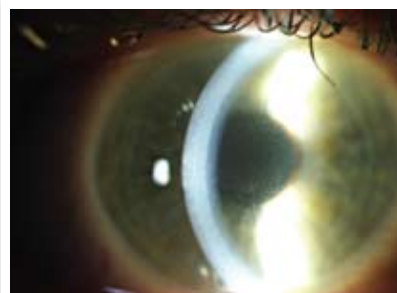
the teaching appointment. The clinical environment can be a little austere, so having the local popular radio station playing in the background can help to make the atmosphere more friendly.

While it is important the parent or guardian understands all that is involved in wearing and caring for contact lenses (especially if they are not a contact lens wearer), it may be best to involve them at the start and end of the appointment. Their presence at the beginning helps to put the child at ease, and returning towards the end serves to allow the child the opportunity to show them their new skills and for the instructor to allay all the important do's and don'ts of lens wear and care.

For a new wearer, lens application and removal three times during the appointment is preferable. Twice can be coincidental, whereas three times demonstrates the skill has been developed. Sometimes parents enquire about whether or not they can handle a lens for their child. Lens application can be taught to carers, but the child must always be capable of lens removal without assistance, in case of emergency during the school day.

Informed consent is an important element to the lens collection appointment, and having the child add their signature to confirm their intention to follow the prescribed advice and return for follow-up visits, in addition to their parent/guardian also signing, helps elevate them to their new responsibility of becoming a contact lens wearer.

● Sarah Morgan is an optometrist and staff development consultant with expertise in the field of patient communication. Her book *The Complete Optometric Assistant* provides a comprehensive guide to teaching the new wearer and includes sample checklists for this purpose. She is delivering a course for optical assistants on Tuesday, December 7 in London, covering many elements of teaching the new wearer. Places are strictly limited, so contact Yolanda Boudeling at the BCLA on 020 7580 6661 to secure your place.



Answer to 'What's this?'
03.09.10.

WHAT'S THIS?

This image shows gross oedema seen with a strong allergic reaction to a soft lens solution.

Thanks to Andrew Gasson for the image.

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