



# 20/20 **ADVICE**

You've been told your kid needs glasses. But the wall of choices, along with his possible resistance, can make it hard to see your options clearly. Here are 10 things to consider.

by **LIZA N. BURBY**

If your kid is having trouble reading an eye chart at school or the pediatrician's office, it's time to head to the optometrist for a full eye health exam. Not only do you want to ensure detection of any eye health issues, you also need to determine if she needs glasses, says George Veliky, president of the New Jersey Society of Optometric Physicians (NJSOP) and director of Omni Eye Services in Iselin. Here's what to look for when shopping for a new pair.

## 1. CHOOSE FRAMES YOUR KID LIKES

One of the best ways to increase the chances he'll actually wear glasses is to let him choose them, says Tamara Petrosyan, assistant clinical professor at SUNY College of Optometry in New York City and chair of the Pediatric and InfantSEE Committee of NJSOP. "A pair of glasses, especially the first ones for a child, can be very exciting or very disagreeable, so it's important to keep them as involved in the process as possible. Allowing

them to choose the style and color that they like can go a long way towards getting them to wear the glasses."

## 2. FIT IS KEY

Kids won't wear glasses that are uncomfortable, so it's crucial that they stay in place. "If the child has a large minus prescription for nearsightedness (myopia), keep the frame as small as possible to reduce the lens thickness

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1 in 4 kids has vision problems that could have been treated if he was screened at the start of school, says the National Commission on Vision and Health.

and weight, and minimize visual distortions on the periphery of the lens," says Dr. Petrosyan. "For younger or more active children, and those who have to keep their glasses on all day long, try a frame where the temples wrap around the ear (cable temples) to keep the glasses in place."

### 3. MAKE SURE THE LENSES ARE MADE OF THE RIGHT STUFF

Children's eyeglass lenses should be made out of either a polycarbonate or Trivex material, which are more impact- and shatter-resistant. "While they might scratch or crack, the chance of a polycarbonate or Trivex lens shattering into the eye is very low," Dr. Petrosyan says. "Both of these materials also have automatic built-in UV protection, and are usually coated with a scratch-resistant coating."

### 4. UNDERSTAND UV PROTECTION

UV light exposure has been linked to several eye diseases, and since kids spend a lot of time in the sun, they should always have UV-coated glasses. Consider buying a photochromatic lens, which will darken when exposed to sunlight and return to transparent when indoors, says Dr. Veliky.

### 5. EVEN KIDS NEED SUNGLASSES

Consider a separate pair of prescription sunglasses and make sure your kid keeps both pairs with him. "For optimal eye health, all children, regardless of whether or not they have problems with their vision, should wear UV-protective sunglasses," Dr. Veliky says.

### 6. PLASTIC OR METAL FRAMES?

Plastic frames used to be the most popular option for kids, but with newer and better metal frames that's changing, says Dr. Petrosyan. "Metal frames, such as stainless steel and titanium, are becoming more durable, less expensive and lighter. They also look more like an 'adult frame,' which children might prefer, since they get to look like mom and dad." When choosing a metal frame, make sure you pick a hypoallergenic material, especially for kids with sensitive skin, since they may be allergic to nickel. When choosing a plastic frame, double check that the nose bridge of the frame fits on that part of their nose, especially since plastic frames don't have adjustable nose pads like metal ones.

### 7. CHECK THE WARRANTY

"Nowadays most eyewear manufacturers and



retailers will offer a warranty on children's eyeglasses, and will replace the glasses for a small fee or no charge," says Dr. Petrosyan. "If you know your child will be rough on the glasses, you might consider purchasing the warranty." Buying a warranty is a good idea if your kid wears glasses full-time since you'll be able to replace them. "If there isn't a large change in the prescription from one year to another then the old pair of glasses can be kept as a backup pair," she says. "Or they can be tinted for a small fee to be turned into prescription sunglasses."

### 8. SEPARATE SPORTS GOGGLES ARE A MUST IN NEW JERSEY

Kids who wear corrective eyeglasses must also wear protective sports goggles when playing school-based, community- or government-sponsored sports. The law was developed by the Coalition to Prevent Sports Eye Injuries in 2006. In an effort to cut down on traumatic eye injuries, the NJSOP recommends safety goggles for *all* kids who play a sport, even if they don't wear glasses, says Dr. Veliky.

### 9. KNOW WHEN YOUR CHILD NEEDS TO WEAR HIS GLASSES

"When to wear them depends on what their prescription is. If they're nearsighted, so they're set up to see closer and distance is a little blurry, they'll want to wear the glasses in school so they can see the board," Dr. Veliky says. "But when they do close work, they can take them off. If they're far-sighted or have an astigmatism, it's better to wear them full-time to help sharpen their vision and to eliminate eye strain. But check with the doctor."

### 10. CONSIDER CONTACT LENSES

Physically, children's eyes can tolerate contact lenses from as early as age three if parents take on the responsibility, says Dr. Veliky. Your kid can wear contacts starting around age six if she's mature enough to be accountable, he added. "If your child wants to wear contacts because they're not happy with the look of glasses, start with a trial of chores to see how responsible they are." Then discuss the option with her eye doctor. Remember: Contacts can't be worn all the time, so she'll still need a pair of glasses.