The Referral Conversation Guide

How to explain developmental optometry to pediatricians, OTs, PTs, SLPs, teachers, and other referral sources.

Every profession that refers to developmental optometry sees the problem from a different angle, and needs to hear something different to trust the referral. This guide gives specific, ready-to-adapt talking points for each of the professionals most likely to encounter these patients before you do.

Pediatricians

The concern to preempt: pediatricians are trained to route eye concerns to ophthalmology by default. Lead with the distinction.

> *"This isn't an ophthalmology referral — I'm not questioning eye health, which sounds normal here. This is about how the eyes work together and focus, which is a completely different system than what ophthalmology screens for. It's common for this to hide behind a normal eye health exam."*

Occupational Therapists

OTs already suspect a visual component in many of their cases — the opening is usually easier here than with any other referral source.

> *"You're probably already seeing this in how they use their eyes during coordination and handwriting tasks. A functional vision evaluation tests exactly the systems you're noticing trouble with — eye teaming, tracking, focusing — and treating that piece alongside your work tends to move things faster for both of us."*

Physical Therapists

Especially relevant for vestibular, balance, whiplash, and post-concussion caseloads.

> *"Balance and gaze stability depend on the visual system as much as the vestibular system. If a patient's symptoms aren't fully resolving with vestibular rehab alone, a functional vision evaluation often finds the piece that's still unaddressed."*

Speech-Language Pathologists

> *"Some of what looks like a language-processing or attention issue during reading tasks is actually a visual efficiency problem — the eyes losing place, or fatiguing under sustained near work. Worth ruling out alongside what you're already assessing."*

Teachers and School Staff

Teachers can't refer directly, but they're often the first to notice — equip them to flag it accurately to a parent.

> *"If a student loses their place constantly, avoids reading, or seems to concentrate fine everywhere except near-work tasks, that's worth mentioning to the parent as a vision-efficiency question, not just an attention or reading-level one. A comprehensive eye exam checks eyesight; this needs a different kind of evaluation."*

School Nurses

> *"The vision screening you're running is built to catch reduced distance acuity. It isn't built to catch binocular vision, focusing, or eye-movement problems, so a student can pass it and still have a significant, treatable issue. Worth knowing what the screening does and doesn't rule out."*

Psychologists

Relevant specifically for ADHD and learning evaluations, where symptom overlap is real.

> *"There's a meaningful, well-documented overlap between binocular vision disorders and ADHD symptoms, especially inattention that's specific to near work. A functional vision evaluation is a reasonable step before, or alongside, an ADHD workup — not a replacement for it."*

Neurologists

Especially relevant for concussion and post-injury caseloads.

> *"A clean MRI or CT rules out structural injury — it doesn't test whether the accommodative, vergence, or oculomotor systems are functioning normally, since that was never what those scans were built to check. A functional vision evaluation picks up exactly what standard imaging can't."*

Other Optometrists

The concern to address directly: fear of losing the patient's ongoing care.

> *"This is a referral for a specific functional evaluation, not a request to take over the patient's general eye care. I'll send findings back, and routine care stays with you."*

A Closing Note on Consistency

None of this works as a one-time mailing. The professionals most likely to actually refer are the ones who've heard this more than once, from a name they recognize, over time — which is the entire argument behind treating referral-building as an ongoing, scheduled effort rather than a single outreach campaign.