

Math Glasses

Exuberance started at the new school in first grade. At the beginning of second grade, he came home one day and told me that he could not do his math homework anymore because the numbers were spinning. “How about reading?” I ask. “Can you still read?” This issue didn’t affect reading, only math. So I read him his math homework out loud.

The next day, his new teacher flagged me down. She told me that Exuberance couldn’t do his math because the numbers were spinning. Good grief! OK, time to call Dr. B., the pediatrician. We discussed the possibility of dyslexia, and he recommended starting with a pediatric eye doctor.

At the eye doctor’s office, Exuberance seemed to have intermittent problems identifying the letters. The tech put a big eye apparatus in front of him and started spinning the lenses. “Is this better or that?” I’m beginning to feel guilty. Maybe he really does have an eye problem! As we left the room, the doctor pulled me aside and told me that her final test was nothing but glass in the lenses and that his eyes were fine. Phew!

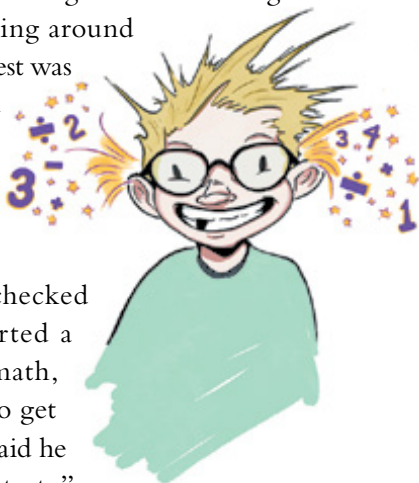
Once out of the office, I explained to Exuberance that he didn’t need glasses and that his eyes were perfect. He completely fell apart and cried all the way home. He was so inconsolable that I decided to take him to our local pharmacy to see if I could find fake glasses. I ended up buying the lowest-strength readers I could find, and when we got home, he slapped them on his dilated, bug-eyed eyes, and banged out two math sheets.

Off to school, he went the next day with his dime-store specs and skipped out of the building at the end of the day, exclaiming his math success. Then I really had a dilemma. I couldn't let him keep wearing the dime-store glasses; it might ruin his sight. I spent that weekend looking for cheap fashion glasses. Hon was working on his master's degree, so I dragged both boys from store to store, striking out at each one. After several stores and a last-ditch effort to convince the saleswoman to sell me the discontinued frames, Earnest began to sense something was afoot while Exuberance was spinning happily around the store looking at frames. "Mom," Earnest asks, "does he really *need* glasses?"

"He thinks he does," I answer.

My trip to crazy land was beginning to seem ridiculous even to me, as I was having difficulty finding kid-size fashion glasses. The saleswoman explained that letting a child wear non-shatterproof lenses would be dangerous and that she couldn't sell me a sample frame. I looked at Exuberance, who was trying to wrestle with Earnest. "Good point!" I phoned Hon to discuss my dilemma of spending money on fake glasses. He tells me to stop running around and buy the glasses. It was the best \$100 I'd ever spent. I ordered the glasses and amused the saleswoman, who was then considering a new marketing scheme. Exuberance was spinning around the store in excitement, and Earnest was shaking his head and trying hard not to laugh at me.

The glasses arrived, and Exuberance danced off to school with his new math glasses. A week or so later, I checked in with his teacher. She reported a remarkable improvement in math, "Although, today I asked him to get his glasses out for math, and he said he didn't need them. He had in contacts." Pretend contacts! Why didn't I think of that? I could have saved some money!



Exuberance's math glasses in action

Mother of Boys Survival Guide

So what's the takeaway from this crazy story? Sometimes, you have to trust your heart over your head when sowing confidence in your son. Sister Sense broke it down for me: Exuberance would have preferred to wear a cape but instead figured out a confidence placebo effect, and that the glasses make him look smart, feel smart, be smart.

Footnote: I eventually confessed to his teacher that he didn't need glasses, just confidence. She later reported that his math glasses were her favorite barometer for determining if her class understood a lesson. She would be teaching, and Exuberance would suddenly dig into his desk and slap on his glasses. Seeing his smart look, she knew she'd probably just lost half of the class and would recap what she had just taught. Exuberance only wore his math glasses for about a year and discovered other ways to build confidence as he grew older.