

## WHAT IS SCOTOPIC SENSITIVITY SYNDROME/IRLEN SYNDROME?

### What is it?

Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome is a perceptual dysfunction affecting mainly reading and writing activities. This was described by Helen Irlen and constitutes a number of symptoms.

Some Dyslexic individuals are thought to suffer from Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome, but not all Dyslexics have the problem. The Irlen Clinics claim to have success for their particular treatment.

It has been said that individuals with this problem have the following symptoms:

- ✦ Skipping words or lines when reading.
- ✦ Re-reading lines.
- ✦ Losing their place.
- ✦ Easily distracted when reading.
- ✦ Often taking breaks.
- ✦ Finding it hard to read for any length of time.
- ✦ Getting headaches when reading.
- ✦ Eyes watering.
- ✦ Preferring to read in a dim light.
- ✦ Reading close to the page.
- ✦ Getting restless or fidgety when reading.

Helen Irlen claims that some of these symptoms may indicate a problem that may be SSS (Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome). It has been said that this is due to an extreme sensitivity to light, and the centres claim that it may affect other areas apart from vision.

Some of the perceptual difficulties may be helped by using coloured filters. These can be used as a coloured overlay over the page or as filters in glasses.

The white background causes fatigue and discomfort and distorts the print on the page. This then requires greater concentration, and then the reader tires more easily, and gets the other problems as a consequence. The Irlen Centre says that this may affect handwriting and attention span. This is understandable when the level of concentration has to be so much greater. The child eventually becomes frustrated and gives up.

A Behavioural Optometrist can assess vision and how the individual processes this. They can give the child or adult vision therapy, to train the eyes to work together. Assessment may be made with a range of coloured filters to assess the right colour for the individual. This will vary from person to person. There are many colour combinations. By allowing the eyes to be less strained, the individual may then be able to concentrate and read for longer periods of time.

### Useful References

*The Irlen Institute in the UK Tel: 01625 583841*

*Helen Irlen Reading by Colours ISBN 0-89529-476-1 (hardback)*