

Dyslexia Assessment and Support Services

Symptoms of Dyslexia



What to look out for Symptoms of Dyslexia

Early identification is important. These children are often creative and imaginative; at the same time, they also have difficulties in some or many aspects of learning. If a child shows a cluster of difficulties, you will need to act. The following can be made into a checklist for each class teacher to use to help with early identification. It is uncommon for a child with dyslexia to only have one Specific Learning Difficulty, many have traits of other SpLDs and many of the symptoms of different SpLDs are common therefore, some of these, such as motor control, may be additional symptoms connected with another SpLD. For example, reversing letters is not a symptom of dyslexia however, about 10% of dyslexics may reverse letters.

Pre-school to Year 1

- Family history of reading and/or spelling difficulties
- Delayed speech – not saying any words by the time they are one and not really talking until they are two and a half or older.
- Problems with pronunciation and mixing up sounds in multi-syllabic words such as aminal for animal, mazageen for magazine.
- Problems with rhyming words (this is one of the biggest indicators when they are younger) and learning rhymes. Has difficulty learning nursery rhymes
- Difficulty with print knowledge linking a letter to its sound.
- Difficulty blending sounds into words
- Difficulty with learning shapes, colours and how to write their own name.
- Difficulty with retelling a story in the right order of events.
- Lots of ear or throat infections (they may then acquire shared symptoms)
- Forgets names of common words or people
- Finds it difficult to dress themselves or to tie their shoelaces- and later any task that has a series of steps which must be completed in a specific order can be difficult- forming letters or long division
- Has difficulty in paying attention, sitting still, listening to stories
- Likes listening to stories but shows no interest in letters or words
- Has difficulty learning to sing or recite the alphabet
- Finds it hard to carry out two or more instructions at one time

A child who has a cluster of these difficulties may be dyslexic. However, it is important to remember that, at this age, the levels of development and speed of learning differ significantly for each child in this age group. When I assessed prep children for schools I might say; this child might be dyslexic or it may be developmental however, I would provide recommendations to implement immediately as, if it is developmental the recommendations will not harm their learning, and if they are dyslexic it will definitely help.

Primary School

Some of your students may struggle with reading, spelling, writing. They do not progress as quickly as their classmates or they don't appear to progress at all. There are obvious inconsistencies in these individuals, many of them exhibiting abilities alongside weaknesses. Over time they do not appear to be making the progress you would expect in certain areas. Below are signs of dyslexia, however it is important to remember that all dyslexics will have their own cluster of signs and symptoms

Reading

- Reads below their expected level.
- Often doesn't like reading books.
- Tries to avoid reading aloud in class. Reads very slowly and using a 'choppy' cadence.
- When reading aloud reads often ignores punctuation. Omits, repeats or adds extra words
- Often has difficulty separating sounds in words, isolating sounds in words and blending sounds to make words.
- Can read a word on one page but doesn't recognise it on the next.
- When they misread a word, it will often be one that looks visually similar, with the same letters such as 'horse' and 'house' or change the sequence of letters in a word such as 'who' for 'how'
- Problems with reading a single word in isolation, where there are no picture clues or storyline to assist.
- When reading will often lose their place on a line, skip lines or may repeat the same line twice
- When reading a sentence or a story will often substitute word that make sense but doesn't look at all similar, for example 'car' for 'bus' or 'trip' for 'journey.'
- Often misreads or omits small words, for example: and, the, as, of, from.
- May read b for d, b for p or u for n = possible directionality difficulty. About 10% dyslexic students have this difficulty

Spelling and Writing

- Significant difficulty with spelling, when writing sentences and stories.
- Spelling ability is often worse than their reading ability.
- Spelling attempts can be bizarre.
- Confuses certain letters when writing, such as 'd' and 'b' (they will often use an upper case 'B' or 'D' etc.) or 'u' and 'n' which may relate to the problem that some dyslexics have with left and right however, only about 10% of dyslexic reverse letters
- Regularly transposes words such as writing 'pot' instead of 'top.'
- Problems with grammar and/or learning prefixes or suffixes.
- Can learn words for spelling tests at school and achieve 10 out of 10. But a day later they misspell the same words in their free writing.
- Find copying from the board very difficult and will frequently lose their place and misspell words.
- Has poor handwriting, badly formed letters with unusual starting and ending points
- Has neat handwriting but writes very slowly indeed
- Spells the same word differently in the same piece of written work
- Work is often very messy with many crossings out
- Forms letters from the wrong place and often has trouble making the letters sit on the line
- There is usually a vast difference between a child's verbal ability and the quality of their written work.
- Most of the writing lacks even the basic forms of punctuation.
- They often can't self-correct their work when proof-reading.
- Finds difficulty using dictionaries, directories and encyclopaedias

Maths

- Has trouble learning colours, days of the week, months of the year and their birth date
- Confuses signs such as x for +
- Can think at a high level in mathematics, but needs a calculator for simple calculations
- Finds mental arithmetic at speed very difficult
- Has problems with sequences like multiplication tables, today/tomorrow
- Has trouble retaining facts
- Has extreme difficulty in telling the time from an analogue clock. They may manage o'clock and half past but anything else becomes too difficult for them.
- They will write some numbers backwards, for example 41 for 14.

Miscellaneous

- Poor concentration
- Unable to follow multi-step directions or routines. For example, if you ask them to get out their maths book, go to their table; write the date and the title at the top of a new page. They may fetch the correct book and bring it to their table or they may write the title in their English/art or science book.
- Many dyslexics have significant problems in directionality, telling left from right
- Finds holding a list of instructions in memory difficult, although can perform all tasks when told individually
- Is disorganised or forgetful e.g. over sports equipment, lessons, homework, appointments
- Is often in the wrong place at the wrong time
- Is excessively tired, due to the amount of concentration and effort required
- Employs work avoidance tactics, such as sharpening pencils and looking for books
- Seems to 'daydream', does not seem to listen
- Is easily distracted
- Is the class clown or is disruptive or withdrawn (these are often cries for help or effective strategies not to fail.)

Secondary School/Adult

It may also help you to recognise and accommodate adults working within your school? The dyslexic teenager or adult will have many of the symptoms described above. In addition:

Reading

- Loses their place easily when reading
- Difficulties with comprehension as a result of slow reading speed.
- Slow and stilted at reading
- Doesn't like reading books, particularly fiction
- Often misreads information

Writing and Spelling

- A marked discrepancy between ability and the standard of work being produced.
- Oral ability is very obviously better than written ability
- A persistent or severe problem with spelling, even with common words.
- Poor speller and often uses many different spellings for the same word in one piece of writing.
- Note-taking may present problems due to spelling difficulties, poor short-term memory and poor listening skills.
- Handwriting may be poor and unformed, especially when writing under pressure.

In addition

- Difficulty learning a foreign language
- Problems memorising facts and therefore would find it difficult to memorise history facts concerning dates, names and places and science facts concerning figures such as the speed of light being 186,000 miles per second
- Has difficulty remembering homework tasks
- Dyslexic people experience extreme difficulty organising themselves and their belongings therefore they will often have messy school bags, bedrooms, desks, offices, garages
- May have difficulty with planning, organising and managing time, materials or tasks.
- Is forgetful or disorganised
- Difficulty with time - forgets appointments, late for meetings, wrong venue
- Cannot remember a full list of instructions
- Forgets telephone numbers or dials incorrectly
- Finds it hard to complete assignments on time
- Often loses information such as addresses, phone numbers, times of meetings
- Although they find some areas of maths difficult, like multiplication tables, long division, time they often excel at higher maths levels like geometry and algebra.
- Finds memorising formulae difficult
- Inaccurate self-image - "I must be thick/lazy/careless" etc.
- Poor short-term memory, especially for language based information, which results in the inefficient processing into long-term memory.
- Students/employees often show a lack of fluency in expressing their ideas, or show difficulties with vocabulary.
- Some students/employees may have continuing pronunciation or word finding difficulties, which may inhibit them when talking or discussing in large groups.

Strengths of people who are dyslexic

Dyslexic people have a unique brain function which makes reading, spelling and writing difficult. However, they often have strengths or are gifted in other areas controlled by the right hemisphere of the brain. These talents show particularly in creative areas and design. Visual spatial awareness is often a strength and therefore they may excel in areas such as architecture, IT design, engineering

Links with other Conditions- Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder. (ADD or ADHD).

ADD is a separate and different condition to dyslexia. Research however, has shown that approximately 40% of people who are dyslexic also have ADD (or ADHD)

Light Sensitivity

Light sensitivity is not dyslexia or a symptom of dyslexia however, a small number of people who are dyslexic also have sensitivity to light, this is sometimes called scotopic sensitivity. This condition makes it very difficult for them to read black print on white paper as the print can blur or cause headaches. This can be remedied by using different coloured paper as a background or using coloured plastic overlays, which makes the print stay still.

When to seek Help

If a number of these warning signs exist, especially if there is a history of dyslexia in the family, you or your child should be assessed for dyslexia.

NB It is preferable that a child is assessed after they reach the age of 7 years as many dyslexia signs can be due to immaturity before the age of 7 years. A diagnosis of dyslexia cannot be made unless there has been six month's intervention and therefore, although learning difficulties can certainly be identified before the age of 7 years a definitive diagnosis of dyslexia cannot normally be made. Sight and hearing should also be ruled out as possible factors contributing the learning difficulty.