

DYSLEXIA

A Language-Based
Learning Disability

Why dyslexia is personal to me



What does dyslexia mean?

- DYS= “difficulty with”
- LEXIA= “language” (spelling, reading, writing, and speech)
- DYSLEXIA is an unexpected difficulty with language despite intelligence, motivation, and education.

The formal definition of dyslexia:

- Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result with a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

But what does that mean exactly?

- Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which results in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading, along with other language skills such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words. Dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment, and in its more severe forms, will qualify a student for special education, special accommodations, and/ or extra support services.

What causes dyslexia?

- Anatomical and brain imagery studies show differences in the way the brain of a person with dyslexia develops and functions
- Most people with dyslexia have been found to have problems identifying the separate speech sounds within a word and/or learning how letters represent those sounds.
- Dyslexia runs in families therefore having a parent or sibling with dyslexia increases the probability that you will also have dyslexia.

Dyslexia is not:

- Dyslexia is not due to lack of intelligence. It can happen to very intelligent people (Albert Einstein, Walt Disney, Thomas Edison,...)
- Dyslexia is not due to lack of desire to learn.
- Dyslexia is not rare (it affects 1 in 5 to some degree).
- Dyslexia is not a visual problem.

Myths and Misconceptions

- It is a myth that individuals with dyslexia “read backwards”. Their spelling can look jumbled, not because they read or see words backwards, but because they have trouble remembering letter symbols for sounds and letter patterns in words.
- It is a misconception that dyslexia is a disease. It is not a disease and, therefore, there is no cure. However, with proper diagnosis, appropriate and timely instruction, hard work, and support, people who have dyslexia can succeed in school.
- It is a myth that people with dyslexia have a lower level of intelligence. In fact, more often than not, the complete opposite is true.

The Good News

- With appropriate teaching methods, students with dyslexia can learn successfully!

The gift of dyslexia-STRENGTHS!

- People with dyslexia can be very bright.
- They are often capable or even gifted in areas such as art, computer science, design, drama, electronics, math, mechanics, music, physics, sales, and sports.
- Look for these, too: Excellent thinking skills, and ability to figure things out, curiosity, a great imagination, talent at building things, inventive, great people skills, good logic, global thinkers, very intuitive and sensitive.

Signs and Symptoms of Dyslexia

Difficulty:

- Learning to speak
- Learning letters and their sounds
- With rhyming words
- Organizing written and spoken language
- Memorizing number facts
- Reading quickly enough to comprehend
- Learning a foreign language
- Correctly doing math operations

Specific signs for K-6 students

Difficulty:

- Remembering simple sequences such as counting to 20, naming the days of the week, or reciting the alphabet.
- Trouble recognizing words that begin with the same sound (ex., that bird, baby and big all start with b)
- With pronunciation of words
- With easily clapping hands to the rhyme of a song.
- With word retrieval (uses words like “stuff” and “that thing” rather than specific words).
- Remembering names of places and people
- Remembering spoken directions.

What you might see in Spelling

- Poor spelling, even on common words or sight words that have been seen and used over and over
- Trying to spell by memory, and may treat every word as a sight word to be visually remembered.
- Spelling words without vowels and with sounds in the wrong order.

What you might see in Reading

- Slow, choppy, inaccurate reading (attempts will often have similar shape or same letters but in different order). Ex.: likes/licks, stop/spot/pots/post, saw/was.
- Guessing based on picture clues or context clues (saying horse when the word is pony).
- Skipping or switching smaller words and prepositions (the, a, of, and, at, to...).
- Leaving off word endings/suffixes.

What you might see in Handwriting

- Odd letter formation (starting at the bottom and going up, using many strokes instead of one, letters have trouble sitting on the line).
- Cursive can be excruciating.
- Odd pencil grip.
- Often leaves off capitals at beginning of sentences, and sometimes uses capital letters midsentence.
- Very little use of punctuation.

What you might see in Speech

- Mispronunciation of words, often switching syllables or sounds (aminal, emeny, bisketti, ambliance).
- Hard time finding the right word (word retrieval) despite having a good understanding of the meaning of the word- may confuse words with similar parts tornado/volcano, manager/janitor, or may try to describe a word; “You know that thingy that you use when...”

What about Directionality Issues?


- People with dyslexia often think in pictures, and are very good at seeing 3 D images (they are often good at interior design, landscaping, architecture, creating with Legos, etc.). Picturing the letter “d” as a 3D shape, it could be a d,b,p,or q depending on your perspective. Therefore you will often see letter reversals, or confusion of letters such as b/p, and n/u.
- These students have a hard time telling/learning the difference between left and right, telling time on a clock with hands, and reading maps.

What about Memorization?

- Unless the student can see the logic behind it, they may have trouble memorizing a list or a sequence of steps, such as months of the year, days of the week, order of the alphabet (without using the song), steps of long division, steps of tying shoes, and basic math facts.

Disclaimer

- Not all students who have difficulties with these skills have dyslexia. Formal testing of reading, language, and writing skills is the only way to confirm a diagnosis of suspected dyslexia.
- A person can have more than one learning or behavioral disability. For example, in various studies as many as 30% of those diagnosed with a learning or reading difference have also been diagnosed with ADHD.

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- Research indicates that as many as 70% of students with classification of SLD would NOT have been classified had they been appropriately screened prior to 1st grade and thus received early intervention strategies.

- Lyon, Fletcher, et al “Rethinking Learning Disabilities”, 2001

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- http://www.readingandspelling.com/Dyslexia_Videos.html