

# IS MY CHILD DYSLEXIC?

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*“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from 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 reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”*

*The International Dyslexia Association, Adopted by the Board of Directors: November 12, 2002.*

The word *dyslexia* comes from the Greek *dys* which means “poor” and *lexis* which means “language or words”. Dyslexia is characterized by problems in expressive, receptive, oral or written language and will be evident in the performance skills of reading, spelling, writing, listening or speaking.

## **Dyslexia facts**

- Dyslexia is a neurological condition which is constitutional in origin. In other words, it results from differences in the structure and function of the brain. It is about the way in which the brain is wired, the function of the wiring and possibly cross-wiring. Since rewiring the brain is not possible, then it is fair to say that dyslexia cannot be cured.
- Dyslexia is not a disease. There is no cure, but dyslexia can be treated. We can teach dyslexic children strategies which help to overcome some of their difficulties.
- *Dyslexic children can learn, they just learn in a different way.* They need special multisensory programs to learn to read, write and spell as traditional teaching methods will not always be effective.
- Early identification and treatment is key to helping dyslexic children achieve in school. However, it is never too late for children with dyslexia to learn to read, process and express information more efficiently.
- Dyslexia is not a behavioural, psychological, motivational or social problem. It is not the result of inadequate instruction, sensory impairment, or other limiting conditions.
- Dyslexia is not the result of low intelligence; in fact there are many gifted and creative dyslexic people. They often excel in the visual arts, drama, sport, mechanics and many other areas that require visual-spatial integration.
- Because dyslexia often goes undiagnosed, estimates of the number of children who struggle with this learning disability vary greatly. According to the International Dyslexia Association, current studies suggest that 15-20% of the population has a reading disability. Of those, 85% have dyslexia.

- A recent report in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* research has shown that boys were significantly more likely to have dyslexia than were girls.

### **What are the symptoms of dyslexia?**

The following characteristics may be associated with dyslexia if they are unexpected to the child's age, grade at school, or cognitive abilities. Many children exhibit some of these characteristics, but that does not necessarily mean that they have dyslexia. A child with dyslexia usually has several of these characteristics which persist over time and which interfere with the learning process. *A formal evaluation by a qualified professional is needed to diagnose dyslexia. The following merely provides guidance on whether you should consider a professional diagnosis.*

#### ◆ **Difficulty with oral language**

- Speech and language delays in early childhood, difficulty acquiring vocabulary or using age appropriate grammar, difficulty pronouncing words
- Difficulty following directions or remembering instructions
- Inaccurate or incomplete interpretation of language that is heard – may need instructions repeated often
- Imprecise spoken language, difficulty in recalling the right word, uses lots of *things* or *stuff* instead of the proper name of an object
- Difficulty in expressing thoughts, needs time to respond verbally when questioned
- Confusion with before/after, right/left, behind/in front, yesterday/tomorrow, etc.
- Difficulty with learning the alphabet, nursery rhymes, or songs
- Difficulty with telling or retelling a story in the correct sequence
- Difficulty understanding concepts and relationships

#### ◆ **Difficulty with reading**

- Difficulty identifying or generating rhyming words (Phonological Awareness)
- Difficulty with counting syllables in words (Phonological Awareness)
- Difficulty with hearing and manipulating sounds in words (Phonemic Awareness)
- Difficulty distinguishing different sounds in words (Auditory Discrimination)
- Difficulty in learning to associate letters with sounds, and in learning the sounds of letters
- Difficulty remembering names and/or the order of letters when reading
- Makes consistent reading and spelling errors which may include
  - Letter reversals – *b* and *d* as in *bog* for *dog*
  - Word reversals – *saw* for *was*
  - Inversions – *m* and *w*, *u* and *n*
  - Transpositions – *left* for *felt*
  - Substitutions – *housse* instead of *home*
- May see words upside down, blurred or distorted
- Errors that show no connection to the sounds of the letters, e.g. reading *under* for the word *pencil*

- Misreads or omits common words
- Poor sight word vocabulary
- Difficulty decoding words – single word identification
- Poor reading comprehension during loud or silent reading
- Slow, laborious reading
- Fear and/or avoidance of reading out loud
- ◆ **Difficulty with written language**
  - Difficulty in expressing thoughts in written form
  - Takes longer than average to do written work
  - Spelling errors may include
    - Letter reversals
    - Word reversals
    - Transpositions
    - Bizarre spelling
    - Mirror writing
    - Additions and omissions of letters
  - Difficulty with applying spelling knowledge and rules in written work
- ◆ **Non-language indicators**
  - A history of reading problems or other learning difficulties in family members
  - Difficulty telling left from right, order of the days of the week, months of the year, etc.
  - Poor sense of direction
  - Poor fine-motor coordination (pencil grip/pressure, cutting, colouring, etc.) and/or poor gross-motor coordination (skipping, hopping, awkward and clumsy, etc.)
  - May have trouble learning to tell time
  - May have difficulty with Mathematics, e.g. understanding the language of Mathematics, learning times tables, counting backwards, reversing numbers, copying correctly, confusing arithmetic signs (+ - x /), problems with sequences and patterns, etc.
  - Poor planning and organizational skills
  - Lacks self confidence and has a poor self image

### **How can you help your child?**

There is no magic cure for dyslexia – it is not going to go away. Dyslexic children grow up to become dyslexic adults. School and learning is a nightmare and the future seems filled with endless struggling and failure. But this need not be so – there are many ways in which parents can help their dyslexic children.

- If you suspect that your child may have dyslexia, have him assessed by a professional to determine exactly what his difficulties are and how severe they are. The assessment provides a basis for making educational recommendations and determines the baseline from which

remediation programs can begin. Once this is known, you can move forward in finding the right help for him.

- Make sure that your child's school is aware of his dyslexia and that he is adequately accommodated in the classroom.
- It is important to explain your child's condition to him. He will feel far better about himself knowing that he is bright and able but has a specific difficulty, than being told nothing at all and feeling stupid and a failure.
- Ensure that your child has a good intervention program. Regular one-on-one private tuition with a specialist will be necessary, but be prepared for a huge commitment in terms of time and finances.
- Boost his confidence and self esteem whenever possible.
- Encourage independence; give him some responsibility in the home especially in areas where he is more capable than his siblings.
- Ensure that siblings and other family members understand your child's dyslexic difficulties, so that they too can help.
- Always emphasise the positive and play down the negative: *Great! You got 2 spelling words correct.*
- Empower yourself, and find out as much as you can about dyslexia – the more you know, the more you will be able to help your child find strategies to cope with his difficulties.

Remember that your dyslexic child *can* learn. But he cannot do it alone. He needs you to make the difference in his life.

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Unfortunately many parents cannot afford the time and expense of long-term private remedial lessons for their child. For those parents who are willing to help their own child themselves, The Learning Workshop offers an alternative solution in the form of individualized home programs. These programs are drawn up by a remedial specialist and are specific to each child's needs. Each program is filled with lessons, activities, worksheets, teaching suggestions, teaching aids, and advice and information relevant to the child's difficulties – enough to last for about 1 month, maybe longer, depending on the child's rate of progress. Progress is monitored and unlimited back up and support is offered while working on each program.

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References:

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The International Dyslexia Association: Fact Sheet # 62 – 05/00, Fact Sheet # 63 – 01/03, Fact Sheet # 76 – 01/00