

How to support a child with dyslexia

Dyslexia is a term used to describe a range of persistent difficulties with reading and writing, and often including spelling, numeracy or musical notation.

Students with dyslexia do not make expected progress in these areas despite good teaching and the type of extra support that would be helpful for most children. But difficulties with dyslexia can be reduced with effective individualised teaching and specialist support.

It is important to identify it early

Literacy is the foundation of all learning so identifying dyslexia early is critical. That way children can be supported to participate in the full range of social, academic and other learning opportunities at school.

Identifying dyslexia before starting school can be difficult and potentially risky as there is so much variation in the way children develop in those early years.

Once identified, it is important that 'dyslexia' is not used as a label, but rather as a means to action. As a label, it encourages people to see all 'dyslexic' students as the same, when we know that they are not. All students' individual difficulties and strengths need to be identified and addressed.

What are the signs that my child might have dyslexia?

Your child may have dyslexia if after a year at school they often display a number of these difficulties:

- unsure of the sound a letter or combination makes eg. h or sh
- poor sense of rhyme
- often mixes up letters or figures eg. b/d/p/q or n/u, or 15 for 51
- great difficulty spelling simple words like 'duck' or 'like'
- highly disorganised – often doesn't know what day it is
- finds learning sequences difficult e.g months
- extremely messy handwriting – letters are poorly formed

- very poor reading, even of very familiar words
- difficulty with things like tying laces, getting dressed quickly, clumsiness, confuses left and right.

How can I help at home?

If your child has dyslexia, you can make a difference. Successful people with dyslexia have said that their success is largely due to the practical and emotional support they received from their parents.

Have fun with your child at home or in the car playing word games and making rhymes, reading together and talking about what you're doing. While language games and reading won't 'prevent' dyslexia, they help by promoting an awareness of the sounds letters make and how language works. Remember to praise and encourage your child, even if they guess wrong.

Infants

- Read, read and read some more to your baby
- Sing songs, chants and rhymes
- Do action songs together

Toddlers

- Read to your child every day
- Let your child see your finger following the text
- Say nursery rhymes, simple poems and finger games together that use rhyming words
- When talking draw attention to rhyming words eg. eat/meat, go/slow, fun/run.

Young and school age children

- Play 'I spy' or 'ka kite au' to help your child learn the sounds of letters. Use the beginning sounds of words as clues
- Play 'change a name' by removing the first letter sound, eg. Timmy becomes immy, mummy becomes ummy

- Play an alphabet game where the child finds a word for each letter of the alphabet
- Clap and count the syllables in children's names and everyday words
- Play riddle games, eg. what rhymes with 'pig' and starts with d?
- Sort everyday objects into groups based on the initial letter sound, eg. pegs, pins, pencils, book, bowl, button. Try extending it to whole words eg. 'Which words start with the same sounds? Dog, doll, mum?'

More tips

- Meeting other children and families with similar difficulties can provide a form of support, help children to know they are not alone and create a sense of belonging
- Out of school programmes can be a good way of providing peer support for other children (and families) in the same circumstances
- Talk to your child's teacher about out of school programmes to find one that supports what is happening at school. You do not want your child being confused by different messages about how to read or write.

Mauri Ora – Be Positive

People with dyslexia can easily and quickly develop low self-esteem and compensatory strengths, such as memorizing text, to try and make up for their difficulties. It is very important for families to support their children's strengths and successes to boost their self-esteem.

How will my school help?

If you have concerns about your child's learning, talk to the teacher. Working with your child's teacher is crucial if your child has dyslexia. The school will identify your child's strengths and learning needs so that they most appropriate help can be put in place. It may be necessary to bring in other people to decide if your child needs special support, such as an individual education programme or help from a special teacher, such as a Resource Teacher: Literacy.

What you can expect when starting school

- Early assessment and identification of reading and writing competencies (within first 6 weeks)
- Regular reports on progress
- Specific literacy support for children not making expected progress by the end of the first year, eg. Reading Recovery, school literacy leader or expert, Resource Teacher: Literacy
- Special education intervention e. Resource Teachers: Literacy and Behaviour, and targeted funding may be available.

Talking with the school and getting support

Start talking to the teacher as soon as you have concerns about your child's progress. The teacher may also approach you.

You should start with your child's teacher. Then if you want to talk to someone else, speak with the head teacher, deputy principal, principal, or perhaps a literacy specialist.

What to talk about

- Concerns about progress and/or self esteem
- What you and the teacher have noticed and when it was noticed
- What you and the teacher are doing to address the problems, eg. tailored teaching, how to address specific learning needs, support in the classroom, home activities, out of school programmes, specialist advice.

What the teacher will share with you?

- Assessments and analysis of your child's learning
- Specific difficulties your child is having and how they are being addressed
- Your child's strengths and how to build on them
- How you can help at home.

Key features of a successful programme

- Dyslexia is identified early

- Students are helped to distinguish the sounds in language, match sounds to letters, and learn the meaning of words
- Practical support is provided
- Activities and tasks that allow learners with dyslexia to recognise not only what they have difficulty with, but also their strengths – a common strength among dyslexic children is the ability to recognise images and to visualise.

[Back to top](#)

Further information

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