

Disability Campaign.org

Reading and Writing with Dyslexia



According to the Dyslexia Center of Utah, “One in five students, or 15% to 20% of the population, has a language-based learning disability.” Dyslexia is a specific learning disability marked by difficulty with reading, writing, and spelling. Often people with dyslexia mix-up letters and words — for example, a “b” is confused with a “d” or the word “was” is read as “saw.” Some letters and words may appear upside down or squished together. It’s important to note that though dyslexia affects a person’s learning, it does not determine someone’s intelligence, such as the case with Albert Einstein and Thomas Edison — two brilliant people with this learning disability.

Because most of us learn languages at an early age, dyslexia is often diagnosed in young children. Teachers or parents may identify symptoms and signs through a child’s reading and writing, such as when a child struggles reading aloud or spelling simple words. Some children, though, go undiagnosed. Though they may learn coping mechanisms and succeed as adults, early diagnosis and intervention will give your child the best opportunity to excel and be confident in his or her language abilities.

Symptoms of Dyslexia

- Problems with reading words
- Confusing small words
- Writing words backwards
- Reversing the shapes of letters
- Slower processing speed
- Memorizing words, dates, or facts
- Problems with writing



Keep in mind that just because a person has one of the symptoms doesn't mean he or she has dyslexia. If these symptoms continue or become more bothersome, your child may need to get tested by a doctor and language specialist or therapist. The specialist may ask questions and perform a skills test to achieve a diagnosis.

Being diagnosed with dyslexia doesn't mean your child can't do well academically, socially and professionally. Your doctor, specialist, or therapist will make recommendations to include tools, techniques and strategies for reading, writing and speaking. If it is determined that your child does have dyslexia, it's important that you not only make changes at home to help your child, but also understand your child's rights to an accessible learning environment at school.

Know Your Rights

Children with dyslexia are protected by three federal laws:

- **The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**, first enacted in 1990 and then updated in 2008, prohibits unjustified discrimination based on disability.



- **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, enacted in 1975 and updated in 1990 and 2004, is designed to ensure that students with a disability are provided a “Free Appropriate Public Education” tailored to their individual needs. This law declares that students with a disability are entitled to an Individualized Education Program, or IEP, that clearly outlines out the services to be provided. The law indicates 14 different categories to define students with a disability who should be guaranteed a free and appropriate public education. Dyslexia is cited as an example in the “special learning disability” category.
- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**. This law defends the rights of students who do not have an IEP, but still require accommodations.

With these laws in mind, consider what accommodations would be helpful to your child. Talk with your child’s teacher and other school administrators to ensure that your child’s unique needs are being met. Remember, you are your child’s #1 advocate!



If your child has an IEP, discuss these accommodations at your next IEP meeting. Remember that your child’s needs may change as he or she progresses through school, so be flexible and make sure to occasionally reassess your accessibility options.

Below are some tips and resources for you to take into consideration as you help your child with the challenges of dyslexia.

Ways to Help Your Child

While this isn't meant to be an exhaustive list, we hope that you and your child will find the following reading and writing tips helpful. Need more ideas? Talk to your child's teacher or reading coach, or visit our Helpful Websites section at the end of this resource.

- **Make it colorful.** Rather than only using a black pen or pencil on white paper, switch it up a bit. Have certain colors represent different things. For example, using colored flashcards, let



the green flashcards represent verbs and yellow flashcards represent nouns. You could also have your child write in colors or doodle inside letters. To help with the sounding out the word "cool," for example, he can color in the O's, or draw little eyes inside of the double O's.

- **Create a memory aid or mnemonic.** Teachers use this trick all the time. For example, remember PEMDAS in math? "Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally" was used to help you remember the order of operations: Parenthesis, Exponents, Multiply, Divide, Add, and Subtract. To help your child remember words, come up with a rhyme or something silly that he or she can associate with the word. For example, if your child is struggling with the word "they," you can use the mnemonic, "They Eat Yams."
- **Read with an accent or in the voice of a cartoon.** Be animated while reading to your child, and encourage your child to do the same! Sometimes a little bit of silliness helps make reading less intimidating. Plus, you might discover your little one is quite the actor!

- **Practice writing in different font styles and sizes.** Have your child write words in all lowercase, or all caps, then maybe in a scribbly font, thick font, or an extra-large font.



- **Play word games.** Who said learning new words must be boring? Games like Go-fish, hangman, and bingo are fun games you probably know well. You may also want to try age-appropriate online word/spelling games or apps that your child can use on a phone or tablet device.

- **Experiment with different writing utensils and materials.**

Maybe your child prefers pen over pencils. You can also try pens/pencils that are thinner or thicker in diameter, or cushioned to make writing more comfortable for her. Similarly, test out different types of papers or notebooks. Test out college-ruled vs wide-ruled notebook paper, or buy your child's notebook or binder in her favorite color. Maybe even try glitter glue!



- **Learn new concepts to music.** Unlike other students, your child may not memorize history facts or scientific vocabulary by just re-reading the textbook or making dozens of flashcards. Try having him learn new concepts to song. Does your child need to memorize the 50 states? Just browse through YouTube or the internet for “50 States Song” to find all kinds of fun and silly songs.



- **Be patient and give praise when deserved.** Your child may read, write, or complete homework at a pace different from other children. As a parent, you can be supportive by showing patience and understanding when your child needs more time to complete homework. Remember to give praise when deserved, and be specific. Rather than just say, “Good job!” try saying something like, “Son, you read that word so clearly. I can tell you’ve been practicing. Great work!”

Computer / Electronic Programs for People with Dyslexia

- **Font Type.** Experiment with the different font types, colors, or styles installed on your computer or within your word processing document. You can also search the web for font types specifically designed for people with dyslexia, such as “Dyslexie.”
- **Background color and lighting.** Consider changing the background image or color on your computer screen, or change the lighting in your office. Colored filters, such as those used for Irlen Syndrome, have also proven to help people with dyslexia. Go to our Helpful Websites section at the end of this resource to learn how you can use a color tint on your Apple or Android devices.
- **Electronic and Audio Books.** Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and AudioBooks.com offer books in electronic and audio format. Many of these books can be read or played from your phone, laptop and tablet or as CD in your car. Devices such as the Amazon Echo or Google Home can read books to you. Plus, your child can “ask them” how to spell a word and hear it spelled back!

Image: Amazon.com

- **Audio recorders or pens with built-in audio recorders.**
Paying attention to teachers while writing notes is tricky with dyslexia. Ask if your child can record the lecture or lesson to listen to afterwards.



- **Voice Recognition and Dictation programs.** Software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking for your PC/Mac or Siri on your iPhone can write for you. These programs use voice recognition software, meaning you speak and they write/type for you. The accuracy can be very high, but some programs have a learning curve and take time getting used to.

Helpful Websites

National Institutes of Health: Dyslexia

For a list of organizations dedicated to serving and informing people with dyslexia, visit:

http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/dyslexia/org_dyslexia.htm.

The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity

Find all kinds of resources, advocacy information, news, and ideas on the topic of dyslexia by visiting:

<http://dyslexia.yale.edu/>

The International Dyslexia Association

Track state legislation on dyslexia, join conferences, and find providers that specialize in dyslexia at:

<https://dyslexiaida.org/>

Dyslexie Font

A special font developed and designed for people with dyslexia to make reading, learning and working easier—and more fun! While the font is available as a download for purchase for those wishing to use it for business purposes, you can download it for free if you plan to use it at home. To learn more, go to

<https://www.dyslexiefont.com/>.

Kids' Corner

A website with fun activities and practical resources for parents and children affected by disability. Visit:

<http://www.joniandfriends.org/kids-corner/>

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