

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a learning difference characterized by problems in expressive or receptive, oral or written language. Problems may appear in reading, spelling, writing, speaking or listening. A person who has dyslexia has difficulties changing language to thought (as in listening or reading) or thought to language (as in writing or speaking).

The difficulties caused by dyslexia are not the result of emotional problems, lack of motivation, poor teaching, mental retardation, or vision or hearing deficits. Dyslexia is not a disease. Researchers have determined that a gene on the short arm of chromosome #6 is responsible for dyslexia. Because this is a dominant gene, dyslexia is highly likely to be inherited.

Dyslexia describes a different kind of mind, often gifted and productive, that learns differently. Dyslexia is not the result of low intelligence. Intelligence is not the problem. A gap exists between learning ability and success in school. The problem is not behavioral, psychological, motivational or social. It is not a problem of vision; people with dyslexia do not “see backward.” Dyslexia results from differences in the structure and function of the brain. People with dyslexia are unique, each having individual strengths and weaknesses.

Many people with dyslexia are creative and have unusual talent in areas such as art, athletics, architecture, graphics, electronics, mechanics, drama, music or engineering. Persons with dyslexia often show special talent in areas that require visual, spatial and motor integration (i.e. drawing, sculpture, dance, sports, etc). Their problem in language processing distinguishes them as a group.

The National Institutes of Health estimate that nearly one out of every five children in the U.S. is affected by dyslexia. Dyslexia occurs among all groups, regardless of age, sex, race or income.

Early intervention is essential for children with dyslexia, which can be identified, at 92% accuracy by ages 5 ½ to 6 ½.

Individuals with dyslexia may need special programs which include a structured language program, direct instruction in the code of written language (phonics) and systematic teaching of the rules for written language to learn to read, write and spell. A multi-sensory approach to language using all pathways of learning (seeing, hearing, touching, writing and speaking) has been proven to be effective for persons with dyslexia.

Some common signs

- ✓ **Organization**, extreme difficulty organizing physical space (prefer to pile things rather than to organize them and put them away), lose things frequently, forget things.
- ✓ **Directionality**, confusion with left/right; over/under, up/down, before/after, ahead/behind, forward/backward, east/west (can show up in handwriting, reading, math)
- ✓ **Sequencing** steps in a task like tying shoelaces, writing capital cursive letters, doing long division, and touch typing.
- ✓ **Memorization**, difficulty remembering facts that are not personally interesting and relevant: such as multiplication tables, science facts, history facts.
- ✓ **Time** concepts and time management like telling time using a clock with hands, remembering the starting times and sequences of classes or activities, using planners or appointment calendars.
- ✓ **Phonemic awareness** which shows up as difficulty pronouncing words, may reverse or substitute parts of words, confuses the order of letters in words, spells poorly and can't recognize the correct spelling of a word (all parts of *phonics* instruction).

Evaluation

No child struggles or fails on purpose. There is always a reason. Parents who suspect that their child is having trouble learning should take notes on the types of errors their child makes, keep copies of their child's work, and talk with their child's teacher to find out how the child is doing in the classroom.

Parents who want their child evaluated for a learning disability (the term used by most schools instead of dyslexia) should make the request in writing to the local school district. The child should be evaluated in all areas of suspected disability.

If it is determined that the child has a learning disability, the evaluation team will provide information and recommendations about the child's needs and suggest educational programs and activities that can be followed by the school and parents to address those needs. If dyslexia is interfering with the child's learning to the extent that the child is not receiving a free, appropriate public education, the evaluation team will provide information so an Individualized Education Program (IEP) can be written by the IEP team.

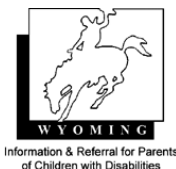
What can parents do to help?

1. Talk about dyslexia – help your child understand his/her learning difference and be able to explain to others what it is and the accommodations he/she needs (“I have dyslexia and my tinted glasses help me to read.”). Be sure your child is aware of the many successful people who have mastered the challenges of their learning difference.
2. Provide structure – teach child to:
 - stay on a schedule (i.e. arise at 7 a.m., dress by 7:15 a.m., bed made by 7:30 a.m., teeth and hair done by 7:40 a.m., breakfast done by 8:00 a.m., and out the door by 8:05 a.m. for the bus at 8:15 a.m.);

- keep clothes and belongings organized (color code, eliminate clutter);
 - provide visual cues (lists and charts);
 - prepare lunches and backpacks the night before to prevent last minute rushing around or forgetting homework or permission slips;
 - give the child age and ability appropriate chores (charts will help children remember **and** give them a sense of accomplishment when they can check off the tasks).
3. Focus on the child's strengths, not weaknesses. Set reasonable expectations and expect the best your child is capable of doing; praise and celebrate small steps as well as big leaps in the right direction; help your child seek out strengths and talents.
 4. Make sure your child has a life outside of school – help your child make friends and have fun doing things that are not associated with academics; encourage your child to participate in activities that he/she enjoys.
 5. Talk with your child's teachers regularly – participate in planning your child's academic program; ask what you can do to help your child at home; stay on top of problems and solve them before they get out of hand (homework not done, or if done, not turned in, frustration with trying to learn new math processes); be your child's best advocate.
 6. Create a "safe" environment at home where your child knows he or she can talk about the difficulties of life with a learning difference – let your child know that you care about and accept him/her no matter what.
 7. Provide constant reminders that you love and support your child.

For more information about DYSLEXIA

CONTACT:



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To talk with the
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In your area, contact:

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DYSLEXIA

Disability Brochure #7



Characteristics and Coping Strategies

Parent Information Center

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