

*Specific Learning
Difficulties/Dyslexia

Practical Help for the Home.*

Please note that the title of the booklet may not reflect your own child's named difficulties and it is not intended to do so.

The booklet has been written with the aim of offering information and practical help for those who wish to support their children with specific learning difficulties or dyslexia at home. Parents of children with other difficulties may also find some of the information within this booklet useful. Not all the information may be relevant to you personally but is offered in the wider context.

The information contained in this booklet has been collected from; dyslexic children; parents; SpLD experts and the author's own experience as a parent, and teacher, of children with SpLD/dyslexia.

WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

Dyslexia has been described as an inability or marked difficulty in learning to read, write or spell despite an otherwise normal intellectual function. Dyslexics frequently perform above average on non-verbal tests of intelligence.

Dyslexia is thought to be a neurological disorder that inhibits a person's ability to recognise and process graphic symbols such as those pertaining to language. It's most common patterns are: extremely poor reading skills, a tendency to read and write words and sentences in reverse sequences, similar reversals of words and letters in the persons speech and illegible hand writing.

Research has shown that dyslexia is more common in males than females and can run in families. Every dyslexic person will display not all the patterns of dyslexia, described below. It is also worth remembering that dyslexia will vary in characteristics and severity between individuals.

PATTERNS OF DYSLEXIA

General

PRE SCHOOL

- Late talking.
- Late to learn colours
- Early speech is unclear.
- Difficulty learning nursery rhymes.
- Difficulty counting or learning the alphabet.
- Enjoys being read to but shows no interest in looking at books themselves.
- Late developing left/right hand dominance.

SCHOOL AGE

- Oral work much better than written work.
- Performance varies from day to day.
- Generally disorganised - forgetting books, losing equipment untidy desk.
- Poor co-ordination, or clumsy.
- Weak concentration

READING

- Confuses letters similar in shape e.g. b, d, p, q. u, n f, t, j, l w, m etc.
- Confusions of letter similar in sound e.g. f, th, v.
- Confuses vowel sounds.
- Sometimes reverses whole words e.g. saw, was on, no
- Will guess a word from its general pattern e.g. reads invite for invent.
- Confuses letter order e.g. felt for left, auction for caution.
- Loses place on a page or misses out lines when reading.
- Confuses word order— may omit or add words.
- May not recognise a word previously known earlier in the passage.
- Frequently forgets and confuses small abstract words e.g. there, they, were, was etc.
- Even when a reasonable reading age is achieved reading is often laboured and broken.
- Reads with little expression or intonation.
- Difficulty remembering or understanding a passage even if it is read correctly.

SPELLING

- Reversing letters and confusing order of letters e.g. hlep for help, dril for girl.
- Spells words using simple phonics e.g. sed for said, anser for answer
- There may be telescoping of words e.g. amil/animal, sudenenly/ suddenly
- There may be confusions with vowels e.g. pen/pin

WRITING

- Generally untidy presentation.
- There may be many alterations and crossings out.
- Poor pen control. Lacking fluency.
- Omits words from sentences.
- Confusions with punctuation.
- Capital letters may be omitted or used inappropriately e.g. raBBit.
- Badly or unconventionally formed letters.
- Erratic letter size
- Problems with spacing and/or difficulty keeping on the line or near the margin.
- Difficulty copying from the board or book.
- May avoid writing where ever possible.

NUMBER WORK

Difficulty learning the "Times Tables."

Reverses numbers and /or symbols

Confuses the order of symbols e.g. writes 13 for 31.

Mental arithmetic may be better than number work involving written language and symbols.

MEMORY

- Difficulty retaining messages or following a number of instructions.
- May forget names of everyday items
- May forget what they are saying mid sentence.

SEQUENCING

- Difficulty remembering the days of the week or months of the year.
- Difficulties with the concept of time e.g. time intervals, yesterday, and tomorrow.
- Difficulty telling the time.
- Difficulty learning and reciting the alphabet.

COORDINATION.

- Awkward gait.
- General clumsiness.
- Poor co-ordination noticeable in PE.
- Difficulty catching a ball.
- Difficulty with cutting
- Difficulty tying shoelaces or tie.

LATERALITY

- Confuses left and right.
- Have poor sense of direction.
- Mixes laterality – perform some tasks right handed others left.
- Confuses directional language e.g. up, down, above, behind etc.

BEHAVIOUR

- Poor concentration
- Lacks motivation
- Lacks confidence or poor self-esteem.

PRACTICAL HELP AT HOME. IN GENERAL

It is important to recognise the significance of the role of the parent in identifying and supporting dyslexic children. Parents have a wealth of understanding of dyslexia as they live with it on a daily basis. They know their children and how dyslexia affects them better than anyone else.



Many parents will also have dyslexia themselves and will fully understand what their children will be experiencing in school. They can therefore explain, in a way a child may not be able to, how their difficulties may be affecting them.

Parents can do a great deal to help their dyslexic children progress through the early years and through their time in education:-

- Act on your instincts. If you feel there is a problem then seek advice or visit the school to "flag up" your concerns as early as you can. When contacting the school or relevant agencies place your concerns/requests in writing (keeping a copy for yourself). You then have a record of what steps you have taken to seek help.
- It is important to recognise that dyslexia is only one part of your child and should not be the dominant factor. Some dyslexic children may already see themselves as being different and this can have a negative effect on their self esteem. See your child as the whole person they are.

- Encourage the child to take up interests/ activities in which they can excel or can use as a break from the pressures of school work. e.g. art, skateboarding, music, sports etc. This will help maintain their self esteem and confidence



- Allow home to be exactly that and not an extension of school. The school day can be extremely tiring and emotionally draining for a child. The last thing a dyslexic child wants is to come home from school feeling exhausted only to face more of the same. Don't expect your child to sit for hours at a time doing homework all evening every night. If homework does take a long time see the homework chapter of this booklet.



- Set aside time to sit and listen to your child explain the good and bad points of their school day. It is important that the child has someone to whom they can express their joy, excitement, worries, feelings, or anger.



- Be prepared to contact the school to find a way of resolving a problem if you are aware that your child is having a difficulty of some kind.

- Working together with the school can have positive effects. Be clear on what it is you are expecting the school to do and what your role will be to help solve the problem.



- Ensure your children develop their social skills by spending time with friends or just relaxing and enjoying themselves.

ORGANISATION.

Many children with dyslexia find it difficult to organise themselves. They forget to take pens, or books to school, forget to pass on messages, lose, things etc. This can cause difficulties when they get to school as it's not always recognised as a genuine difficulty especially when it's the homework they have forgotten to hand in. Organising your child for them will not help them to develop the necessary organisation skills they need to master to be successful in school or even as adults.

PRACTICAL HELP

- Set up routines at an early age so the children learn to organise themselves as a matter of routine, e.g. putting things away in correct boxes/places, getting clothes, sports bags, or school bag ready for the next day before going to bed the night before. Supervise them rather than do it for them.
- Use memory joggers such as using a checklist or using a note pad as a "to do" list/ reminder on a regular basis. The earlier this strategy is used by the child, the easier it will be for them when they have to remember to take/do so much in school. Encourage your child to regularly use the school planner if they are issued with them.



Take PE kit to
school

Useful School Equipment.

1. Diary/ Notebook or planner.

This helps the child to organize their work, remind them what they need in lessons or records homework.

A planner helps the older child to coursework deadlines etc.

It will only be useful if the child gets into the habit of checking it regularly.

2. Highlighters Pens.

These are very versatile especially if the child has a range of colours of these inexpensive pens.

They can be used to highlight particular patterns in words that the child may be focusing on for spellings or reading.



They may be used to colour code information the child may be need to use for answering questions.

They can be used to highlight main points in longer passages or particular instructions that the child needs to remember. This can reduce the need for rereading whole passages. They child can just focus on the main points.

3. POST It! Notes

Like highlighters these are inexpensive but very useful for children to use. They come in various sizes for different purposes.

The large ones can be used as reminders that can be stuck on books, items or places.



The smaller ones can be used as page markers in books so the child knows exactly where they are.

The smaller ones can be used to write parts of words so the child can “break” the words up and stick them back together again to make a complete word. Using different colours for each part of the word (syllables) will be useful here.

4. Eraseable Ink Pens.

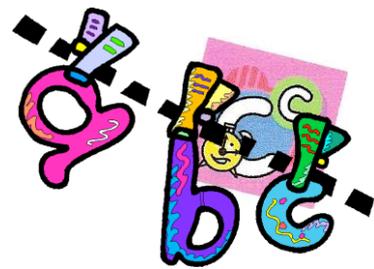
These are useful for those children who frequently cross out words making their work look untidy.

They can simply rub out the mistake and rewrite it in ink. If they are really unsure of a word to spell they can always try it out several times on a post it note.



PHONICS.

One of the first things parents do when preparing a young child for school is to teach them to count and the alphabet. Many children know all or part of the alphabet by the time they start school. Other children already demonstrate some difficulty in this area.



PRACTICAL HELP

- When teaching the alphabet it is important to teach the child the name of the letters (ay, bee see) as well as the sounds. Teach the child the written letter too. All too often the child can recite the alphabet but does not know the shape of the letter to match the name/sound.
- Use the correct names and sounds right from the beginning. It is important that the children can hear pure sound of the letter because they will need this when they start word building. Avoid using what is known as the schwa. This is the "u" sound said after a letter when it is not represented by a letter. E.g. the letter "m" should be pronounced "mmmm" rather than "m _ u", this applies to all the other letters too where ever possible. Some letters are hard to say with out putting an "u" sound after it. However it can be reduced to a minimum.

If the child finds learning the alphabet difficult use objects or pictures to help them associate the letter with something familiar. E.g. this is the letter "a" (say letter name). One of the sounds the letter "a" (**name**) makes is "a" (**sound**) as in apple. Here is an apple we can eat, open your mouth to bite the apple and say a! What letter makes the "a" sound? What does the letter look like?

SPELLINGS.

Many children are given reading and spellings to learn every week. Dyslexic children will need to practise these as often as possible. It's easier to learn little and often rather than try to memorise the whole list the night before the test.

Encourage your child to practise their spellings every daily. Try using some of the methods below to help them learn.

Method 1. LOOK, SAY, COVER, WRITE, CHECK.

1. Look at the list of words and think about any patterns that you can see e.g. all the words end in "-at"
2. LOOK at the first word - say the word e.g. cat
3. SAY (aloud) and repeat the spelling of the word until you think you know it. ALWAYS spell the word using letter names, e.g. cat = c.a.t = "see, ay, tee" = cat
4. When you think you know it, COVER the word and WRITE it down – keeping saying the spellings as you write. If you forget the spelling, have a quick peek at the word again.
5. Uncover the word and CHECK to see if it is correct. Go on to the next word or practice it again if it was wrong.

Method 2. TAPED SPELLINGS

You will need a cassette player or recording device e.g. pc program.

1. Look at the list of words and think about any pattern that you can see.

RECORD the spellings: -

2. Set up your recording device to record speech.
3. Read the first word then leave a few seconds pause.
4. **Spell** the word using LETTER NAMES then read the word again e.g. cat (pause) - see, ay, tee - cat.
5. Repeat for the next word until the list is done. Speak clearly and steadily – not fast.
6. If you make a mistake when recording, stop the device, and record that word again.
7. Set the device to the beginning.

PRACTICE the spellings.

1. Use the play and pause buttons on your recording device.
2. Press play to start, listen to the first word being read, spelt and read again – pause the tape. (Rewind and repeat if you need to listen again.)
3. Write the word down. Start the tape for the next word.
4. Repeat until you have finished the list.
5. When you think you know the words TEST YOURSELF.

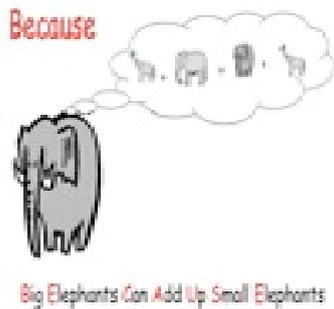
TEST yourself.

1. Rewind and play the tape. This time you pause the tape after the word is read the first time.
2. Write the word down. Start the tape. Check what you have written your word correctly as it is spelt out on the tape.

Other Ways to help with spellings.

Mnemonics.

Encourage the use of mnemonics. These are sayings or pictures that help the child how to remember to spell words or information. e.g. **Big Elephants Can Add Up Small Elephants = BECAUSE.**

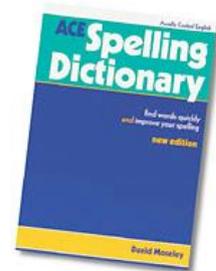


Proof reading

Encourage your child to proof read what they have written or spelt. Errors are often spotted on a second look when they are not concentrating on the mechanics of writing as well as spelling.

Spellcheckers

Electronic spell checkers such as the Franklin Spellchecker are often helpful. These do have to be used with caution. If your child has weak visual discrimination skills they may find it difficult to choose the correct word from the list of similar words given by the checker. Instead, they may find the auditory based dictionary more helpful. This works by using the sounds in words to find the spellings. The Ace Spelling Dictionary is one of these kinds of books.



READING

Reading is a problem area for children with dyslexia but this is not always the case. Some children may be good at the mechanics of reading. However, they may have difficulty with understanding the meaning and with comprehension skills.

PRACTICAL HELP

Avoid the temptation to rush your child through a reading book so they can be seen to move up levels. This puts unnecessary pressure on the child because they are faced with a book that is too difficult for them.



Make reading a pleasant experience. Add fun elements. Put the words onto cards and make games with them.

Don't let your child struggle for ages over a word. Tell them the word then discuss the sounds and patterns that make up the word.

HOW TO PRACTICE READING.

1. Look at the page you are learning. **DO NOT** move onto the next page until you know the words and sounds on the page. Remember, it is a new page so, don't expect to know all the words when you first read it. The first time you read a page see it as a hunt to find words you are not sure about.
2. When the words are in lists, learn one column at a time; again do not move on to the next column until you **know it well**. When the words are in a story, practice the words until you know them then read the page to understand the story. Learn a few words at a time.
3. Look at the words in each column and think or talk about any pattern that you can see in the list of words, e.g. – cat, bat, fat sat – all the words end with “at”.
4. Think or talk about the letter patterns and where the pattern is in the word.
5. Break the word into its **SOUNDS**. How many sounds are there? cat = c+a+t = 3. What letter/letters make up the individual sounds.
6. Sometimes a sound can be made with more than one letter, e.g.: -
“th” 2 letters making one sound -- th+a+ t = that
“dge” = 3 letters making one sound (j) -- b+r+i+dge = bridge.
7. “Glue” the sounds back together. How many ways can you do it? Read the sounds as you do it.
e.g. c+a+t = cat, c+at = cat, ca+t = cat.
th+ a+ t = that, tha + t = that, th + at = that. Use plastic letters to help you.
8. In big words see if you can find smaller words inside the big words, e.g. **standing**.
9. Break bigger words into their syllables, e.g. concentrate = con – cen - trate Colour code the groups of letters to help you read them.
10. If you get stuck after that, ask someone to help you. They will tell you what the word is. You should look at the word and repeat it aloud.
11. To help you remember the words, draw pictures to go with them.
12. Play games with the words. Write them on pieces of paper and play games such as pairs or snap. Play board games - earn your turn with the dice by reading the word on the paper. If you get it right, throw the dice. Miss a turn if it's wrong.



WRITING.

The art of writing is not as easy as it looks. The children have to think about what they are going to write, where on the page they are going to start and in which direction the words go. The children then have to think of the physical act of moving the pen / pencil to form the correct letters, and write in a line so that others can read what they have written. Those dyslexics who have coordination difficulties will find this very difficult. Their writing may be slow and untidy.



PRACTICAL HELP

When your child is first learning to write encourage them to use the correct hand grip and to form their letters correctly.

- Encourage your child to develop cursive (joined up) writing because this helps them to see the links between the sound and pattern when writing the words down. Correct letter formation helps the child tell the difference between letters such as band d. If written correctly they feel different. because they have different start points and form different parts of the letters in differing order, e.g. 'b' = down the stick and then round the bubble while 'd' = round the bubble then up the stick
- If your child finds it difficult to hold the pen correctly use pencil grips or hand writing pens to help them
- If the child finds it difficult to start writing or doesn't know where to start, write the first few words for them and let them finish the sentence.
- If the child has long pieces of work to write help them to plan it first using strategies such as mind maps (spider grams) and flow charts to help them.
- If the child has difficulty with the physical side of writing encourage your child to develop their **typing skills** and encourage them to type their work whenever possible.

Having good keyboard skills will help the child when the level of written work increases especially at the age when they have coursework as part of external exams. Typing eases the problem of the physical side of writing. It is much easier to press the key than write the letter or letters. With practice their typing speed can be increased to the point of being faster than handwriting. They also have the advantage of using the spell checker on a computer and using the cut and paste facility rather than have to rewrite a piece to correct errors. This will cut the time taken to complete an essay.

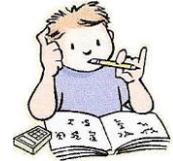


HOMEWORK.

Dyslexic children may take hours to complete homework, which will take others a fraction of the time. The dyslexic child may often find the school day exhausting because of the efforts of having to concentrate, struggle with literacy skills, and contain their emotional feelings. The last thing the child wants to do is continue with the effort when they get home.

PRACTICAL HELP.

- Provide the child with a quiet place free from any distractions such as the T.V to do their work. Ensure they have their pens, paper, books, drink etc. ready on the table before they start. It is a good delaying tactic to keep getting up to fetch forgotten things or pop to the toilet!
- A tired child loses concentration more frequently so plan regular breaks and rest times during the homework session.
- Most schools provide children with school planners. Get into the habit of checking your child's planner to find out what homework they have. Ask the child what homework they have to do and I doubt very much they'll remember!
- Contact the school if the child is having difficulty writing homework into the planner during the lesson. Perhaps a friend can help the child to put the homework into the planner.
- Agree with your child a time during the evening/morning that homework will be done, preferably in a quiet area of the house e.g. 6-7.30pm. Give the child a reward or incentive when they work between those times.
- Contact the school and agree a set time in which each piece of homework should be completed. Set a timer at home and stop the child at the set time. Write in the child's homework book (use the margin next to the work) stating how long the homework took to that point. The teacher then knows the incomplete work is because of a lack of time rather than a lack of effort.
- If, for some reason, the work needs to be completed and you can see it will take the child hours to do then other strategies need to be adopted. Again agree a set time for how long/how much they will write. Once that time is up stop the child. The parent then takes over the writing. The child dictates to the parent who then writes it down until the work is completed. As with the point earlier, write what you have done in the margin of the work so the teacher knows the work is the child's and has not been done by someone else.



THE TIMETABLE.

The secondary timetable, for a dyslexic child, can be very confusing. It's full of details like the subject, the room number and often the name of the teacher taking that subject. All this is tightly packed into lots of little squares. Some timetables work from left to right others from top to bottom. e.g.

Monday	Eng Mrs Jones Rm L25	Science Mr Parker Rm S9	French Mrs Joseph Rm L18	IT Mrs Dean Rm T7	History Mr Davis Rm H6
Tuesday	Maths Ms Wyn Rm H15	RS Mr Hogg Rm L9	Geog Mr James Rm H17	Games PE Staff Gym	Eng Mr Jones Rm L25

For the dyslexic child this can be too cluttered to copy down and almost impossible to navigate! It's quite common to see new pupils carrying all their books around with them each day because they have been unable to copy their timetable.

PRACTICAL HELP

The dyslexic child may need help to copy the timetable and have it simplified. Here are some ideas on how the child's timetable can be adapted.

Method 1

Remove any non-essential detail. e.g. teacher's name. The pupil will soon learn the teachers name in class. Colour code the subjects and possibly match the squares to the book colour the pupil has for that subject or place a coloured sticker on the book e.g.

Monday	Registration	Science F217	English J211		
Tuesday	Science F217	Games Gym			

Method 2.

Put each day's timetable onto a separate card so the child only has to look at one day at a time. Draw pictures to relate to each subject and add reminders of things to take to school. Again the subjects can be colour coded to the books. The child takes one card to school to follow for the relevant day. The child keeps a spare set of cards at home and gets into the habit of getting their school bag ready the night before. This will hopefully avoid forgetting things because they are in a hurry in the mornings.

<u>Monday.</u>	
1. English J211	
2. Science F 2 1 7	
3. French F 011	
4. Maths F 104	
5. History F 014	
.....	
Also Take.	
Dinner money, pencil case, calculator, homework,	

Useful Software to download for free or Purchase.

Spelling:



Look Cover Write Check Method Spelling Program Free to download
<http://www.freenetpages.co.uk/hp/khughes/rnrspelling/>

General Audio Program that is very good for recording spellings to play back:
<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

Typing
Free touch-typing programs.
<http://www.kidwaresoftware.com/kidtype.htm>

<http://sense-lang.org/typing/>

Reading: - The popular ---
Word Rescue and Maths Rescue!
<http://www.redwoodgames.com/>

(Online)
<http://www.funbrain.com/brain/ReadingBrain/ReadingBrain.html>

<http://www.starfall.com/> (younger children)

Mindmaps Freemind
<http://freemind.sourceforge.net>

Programs to purchase
Learn to type program, complete course.

<http://www.iota.co.uk/touchtype/>

Text Help, (text to speech)
This is where the computer reads back what has been typed. (Be warned it is expensive)

<http://www.texthelp.com/page.asp> (Info page)

http://www.texthelp.com/page.asp?pg_id=1003 (Shopping cart page)

Word games.
This site has the popular “Word Krispies” Free to trial, approx £10 (\$19) to purchase. Look out for other word games on this site.

<http://www.games2download.com/free-word-games/word-krispies.htm>

Spelling and Maths
Word shark, Number shark

<http://www.numbershark.co.uk/>