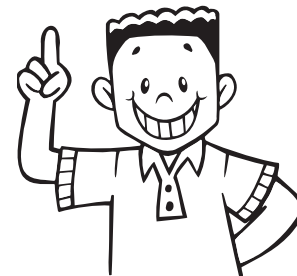




Dyslexia

A Common Childhood Learning Disability

By Keri Spielvogle, M.C.D., CCC-SLP



Did you know that dyslexia is the most common cause of spelling, reading, and writing problems? How do you help children overcome and/or manage these difficulties for school success? The following information is to help parents, teachers, and therapists understand dyslexia and help their children/students develop a love of reading and writing.

What Is Dyslexia? What Causes It?

Dyslexia is a learning disability. This means it affects one's ability to adequately learn, process, and retain information. Dyslexia, specifically, causes problems in spelling, reading, and writing by affecting word recognition, reading comprehension, phonological awareness and recognition, and decoding of words. This inhibits a child's ability to learn to read, even with normal intelligence and classroom instruction.

The causes of dyslexia are usually genetic in nature; however, a much less common cause is head injury or trauma. Some children with dyslexia appear to process information using a different area of the brain than children without a learning disability: However, this is not characteristic of all children diagnosed with dyslexia. Some types of dyslexia may decrease in severity as a child ages.

I Think I Know a Child Who May Have Dyslexia. What Should I Do?

Identification of dyslexia may be difficult to make as a parent or classroom teacher. Parents and teachers can become aware of some signs and symptoms of dyslexia, possibly warranting an evaluation by a health professional. Take note of the following:

- Difficulty associating a letter with its sound
- Reversals of letters (dig for big) or words (tac for cat)
- Difficulty reading single words
- Difficulty spelling single words
- Difficulty copying letters/words from the board or a book
- Difficulty understanding what they hear (auditory)
- Difficulty organizing work, materials, and time
- Difficulty retaining content of new and familiar material
- Difficulty with writing tasks
- Awkward fine motor skills (difficulty holding writing utensil)
- Incoordination/awkwardness
- Behavioral problems and/or a dislike for reading

If a child exhibits a number of these signs and symptoms of dyslexia, you can refer the child to the special education department or pediatrician to coordinate an evaluation with a team of professionals familiar with dyslexia. Some states may require referral to a school counselor. (Please note: The above is not an inclusive list of signs and symptoms of dyslexia. Use this list as a general guideline only, not as a basis for diagnosis. Follow your school's guidelines for referrals.)

What Can I Do to Help?

After an evaluation is complete, the results should show the way the child learns best. Is the child an auditory learner, meaning that s/he learns best by hearing information? Is the child a tactile learner, meaning that s/he learns best by touch or "hands-on"? Finally, is the child a visual learner, meaning that s/he learns best by seeing information? Using the child's learning style when presenting new information may be beneficial to the child with dyslexia.

Some suggested activities for each area include:

* **Visual** — These children learn best when seeing information. Therefore, a good place to start is using picture cards with the words printed underneath. Be sure to choose words that are at the child's learning level. Also, if the child is having difficulty with phonemic awareness, showing the child how the mouth forms the sound may help with generalization. To do this, place the target letter (/t/) on a card and place it beside your mouth. Make the /t/ sound, exaggerating the movement. Allow the child to mimic your actions while looking in a mirror. Progress to simple CV (toe) and CVC (top) combinations, both in speech and writing. Help with organizational skills by using icons (pictures) combined with words on a daily calendar. Review this calendar daily, marking off tasks as they complete them.

* **Auditory** — These children learn best when hearing information. Presenting auditory information works best with these children. For phonemic awareness, present minimal paired words and ask the child to tell which word is correct (dog/gog). Also, have them write letters, words, or sentences as you say them, practicing their writing skills. Help with organizational skills by setting up a "verbal" calendar. Read aloud with the child his/her schedule daily and help him/her keep track of assignments, appointments, etc.

* **Tactile** — These children learn best with "hands-on" learning. These are the children you see taking something apart and putting it back together again. They learn best through touch, so it's important to incorporate this learning style in your instruction. Let the children make letters from clay, spelling short words. Review the sound of each letter as the child makes it. Also, a tactile spelling kit may be beneficial for these learners. These include letters with textures on them, so the child gets tactile feedback while spelling. Help with organization by combining visual and tactile learning. Make up a calendar and mark each important date with a "fuzzy" sticker. Each day, review the calendar with the child, allowing him/her to feel the stickers. This combination of visual and tactile learning can help with retention.

Listed above are some suggestions for teaching children with dyslexia by focusing on their individual learning styles. Feel free to adapt these suggestions for each child. Remember individual teaching time and early identification of this disability leads to better reading success!