

Identifying Dyslexia

How can I tell if a child may be experiencing a specific learning/reading difficulty or dyslexia?

As teachers or parents we have all come across the child who is experiencing difficulty with reading, writing, spelling or maths, who does not: appear to progress as quickly as their class peers or even worse, does not seem to make progress at all. Then someone mentions dyslexia and you wonder if this is the possible cause of the child's difficulties.

Children are born with dyslexia but it doesn't become a noticeable problem until they start to use words, and some-times other symbols, People in all socio-economic groups and at all intellectual levels are affected by dyslexia, and the degree to which the learning process is affected can vary from slight to very severe. It can afflict up to 10% of the population. It is also thought to affect boys more than girls in tile ratio of 4:1. Although there is no cure for dyslexia, skilled specialists and hard work can alleviate the adverse effects of dyslexia. Other conditions such as ADD often exist alongside dyslexia but are not the cause of it. School failure as a result of dyslexia may cause some children to become distractible, inattentive, and impulsive but they do not necessarily have ADD.

The recent Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia (2001) has highlighted the Irish situation. It assesses current educational provision and support services, and makes recommendations for the development or adjustment of existing policy approaches. The Task Force defines the term dyslexia as being:

A continuum of specific learning difficulties related to the acquisition of basic skills in reading, spelling and/or writing, such difficulties being unexpected in relation to an individual's other abilities and educational experiences. Children experiencing dyslexia can be helped most when their condition is identified early. Good progress in reading is usually linked to a highly structured programme of teaching, often including a multi-sensory approach. Children make progress in spelling but seldom to the same extent as in reading and make much more limited progress in the development of their writing. Children with dyslexia do learn but they learn differently.

Dyslexia can be diagnosed with certainty by a psychologist who, in addition to other tests will calculate a person's expected reading age with their IQ and age. The difference between this and the actual reading age as measured with a reading test, gives a measure of the reading difficulty. In Ireland, as in other countries, set criteria are set out to identify dyslexia and to determine if special educational provision is required. This criteria, includes whether achievement as measured by a standardised, norm referenced test, is low and whether general ability is in the average range or higher. The DES currently has set a cut

off point of the 2nd percentile. However, there has been much criticism in relation to these approaches as many children are excluded from accessing services because of scores falling outside specified cut off points. It is hoped in a later submission to give ideas in relation to teaching programmes suitable for children experiencing dyslexia.

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WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF DYSLEXIA?

The following list may help in the identification of dyslexia, especially if they are exhibited over a long period of time. However, many children will display some of these characteristics in their natural progression through school:-

1. Speaks later than most children.
2. Pronunciation problems.
3. Slow vocabulary growth, often unable to find the right word.
4. Difficulty rhyming words.
5. Trouble learning numbers, alphabet, days of the week, colours, shapes
6. Extremely restless and easily distracted.
- 7- Trouble interacting with peers.
8. Poor ability following directions or routines.
9. Fine motor skills slow to develop.

Age 5-7

1. Slow to learn the connection between letters and sounds.
2. Makes poor reading progress, especially using look. and say methods.
3. Finds it difficult to blend letters together
4. No expression in reading, comprehension poor,
5. Is hesitant and laboured in reading, especially when reading aloud.
6. Falls to recognise familiar words
7. Makes consistent reading and spelling errors including letter reversals (b/d), inversions (n/u), transpositions (was/saw), and substitutions (house/home),
8. Transposes number sequences and confuses arithmetic signs (=,+, -,x, /)
9. Slow recall of facts,
10. Slow to learn new skills, relies heavily on memorization.

- 11.. Impulsivity, lack of planning.
12. Unstable pencil grip.
13. Trouble learning about time/poor timekeeping.
14. Poor coordination, unaware of physical surroundings, prone to accidents.

Age - 8-12

I. Reverses letter sequences (soiled/solid, left/felt), Produces phonetic and bizarre spelling: not age/ability appropriate,

2. May spell a word several different ways in one piece of writing,
3. Slow to learn prefixes, suffixes, root words, and other spelling strategies.
- 4- Avoids reading aloud.
- 5- Trouble with word problems.
6. Illegible writing or difficulty with handwriting.
7. Awkward, fist-like, or tight pencil grip.
8. Avoids writing composition
9. Slow or poor recall of facts,
10. Difficulty making friends,

n. Trouble understanding non-verbal social cues (body language, facial expressions,

12-Has poor personal organisation

13. Performs unevenly from day to day
14. Employs work avoidance tactics such as.-
looking for books, using the toilet regularly

A child who has a cluster of these difficulties together with some abilities may be dyslexic.

There are a number of diagnostic tests that teachers can use in the early screening of dyslexia. These include the Dyslexia Early Screening Test (DEST) and the Cognitive Profiling System (CoPSi).

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