



Dyslexia

Understanding Language-Based Learning at Every Age

WHAT TO KNOW

- Dyslexia is a language-based learning disorder. Most commonly, someone with dyslexia has trouble making the connection between a sound and the symbol that represents it.
- Dyslexia is a lifelong disability—however, while someone might have dyslexia for their whole life, the disability can be effectively addressed and reduced to extremely mild levels through the right interventions, services, and support.
- Dyslexia can be difficult to spot in early learners, but an early-as-possible diagnosis can make a profound difference on the impact of treatments.

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COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

People think that dyslexia is a visually-based disorder, in which case someone might “mix up” the letters in a word while they are reading. In fact, dyslexia is a language-based disorder unrelated to vision.

ROOTS OF DYSLEXIA

What if, no matter how carefully you looked at a word, you could not articulate the sound that each letter in the word represented? That is a simplified description of dyslexia—and as a language-based learning disorder, dyslexia can have a profound impact on a child’s ability to read, spell and decode the words on a page. The struggle is most often phonological, where an individual cannot make the connections between the symbols and sounds that make up a word, and the understanding and manipulation of those sounds.

For many people with dyslexia, there is a family history of the condition. Usually, there is a family member who struggles with spelling or their rate of reading, even if dyslexia was never formally diagnosed. For others, it’s their ability to process orthographic information, the representation of printed letters and words, that indicates the probability of dyslexia. It can be challenging to identify the condition, especially in preschoolers, because it’s more typical for a child that age to struggle with being able to listen, retain, and then attach a sound to a symbol. Confirming and intervening as early as possible is key, because early intervention minimizes the time that dyslexia can interfere with a child’s development.

ADDRESSING DYSLEXIA

Two components help address dyslexia: an accurate assessment, followed up by practical, research-based interventions. Both must be age-appropriate and focused on addressing specific issues, considering the developmental stage of a child, and enabling that child’s feelings of confidence and competence. The goal of treatment is to make basic reading skills automatic, so that learners can then focus on higher-level functions such as fluency and/or comprehension.

CONCERNS AND RESISTANCE

The older a child is, the more they might resist the idea of having or treating dyslexia. Part of the treatment process is teaching children with dyslexia to be able to accept and voice what their challenges and needs are, and learning to become an advocate for themselves—developing self-awareness and the capability to source what they need to succeed.

“ Make the right connections at the right time. ”

OPTIMAL INTERVENTION

Experts advise that intervention by grades 2 or 3 can create the best results. However, addressing dyslexia at any age has its benefits. With older children, even up to college age, a combination of therapies becomes an effective plan of action: accommodation using assistive technology to help with immediate educational needs, along with intervention using therapies to rebuild basic skills.

The most important element is to instill an awareness in previously undiagnosed individuals: it's not that they are unable to learn, it's that there are symptoms in play that can be fixed or improved with the right intervention, training the brain to make the right connections at the right time.



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