

- \* ASL Helpline is run by the Special Needs Information Point (SNIP). It is a parent-led organisation based at Edinburgh's Royal Hospital for Sick Children, offering a range of information and support for parents.

[www.snipinfo.org](http://www.snipinfo.org)

ASL Helpline 0131 536 0583

- \* The British Dyslexia Association website has information on a wide range of relevant topics.

[www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

- \* The American website below has considerable information about dyslexia and supporting children at home.

[www.dyslexia-parent.com](http://www.dyslexia-parent.com)

# Dyslexia: Information for parents



## What is dyslexia?

When children, young people and adults have difficulty developing fluent reading and spelling, they are sometimes described as dyslexic.

The British Psychological Society's working definition of dyslexia says that:

*Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the 'word level' and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities.*

Dyslexia can occur among people of all levels of ability, of all linguistic backgrounds and in all social groups. The consequences vary from learner to learner and may range from mild to severe.

Dyslexic learners may have difficulties with:

- \* phonological awareness – they may identify and process sounds within words
- \* oral language skills
- \* number skills
- \* visual processing – perhaps involving sequence and directionality
- \* memory and personal organisation

As everyone is unique, schools take account of the particular strengths and areas for development that each learner brings to the task of reading and spelling. Teachers then use this information to plan how they will support each pupil's learning.

## Understanding dyslexia and its impact on learning

Here are some books that parents, children and young people have found helpful:

\* *Dyslexia – A Parents' Survival Guide*, by Christine Ostler and published by Ammonite Books

\* *Dyslexia: Talking it Through*, by Althea Braithwaite and published by Happy Cat Books

\* *Practical Strategies for Living with Dyslexia*, by Maria Chivers and published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Here are some useful websites and phone numbers. Please note that the education authority is not responsible for the content of external websites and may not share the opinions expressed there.

\* The Dyslexia Scotland website contains information for parents about dyslexia and supporting dyslexic children at home.

[www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk)

Telephone 0844 800 8484

\* Enquire, the Scottish advice service for Additional Support for Learning, publish a range of information for parents and young people.

[www.enquire.org.uk](http://www.enquire.org.uk)

Telephone 0845 123 2303

## When exams come round...

Learners who are dyslexic may need assessment arrangements in order to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding under examination conditions. They may need extra time and may need to word-process their answers; they may need someone to read the questions for them, to act as a scribe, or some other arrangement appropriate to their own circumstances.

Detailed guidance is published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, currently under the title *Guidance on Assessment Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities and/or Additional Support Needs 2008*, and this can be found on their website [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)

If you feel that your child may need assessment arrangements, please discuss this with the school.

## Support in higher education

Some learners going on to higher education may be eligible for the Disabled Students Allowance. This is paid to students following an assessment of their support needs, and can be used to pay for ICT support, additional photocopying costs, support with study skills and so on. Further information is available from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland at [www.student-support-saas.gov.uk](http://www.student-support-saas.gov.uk)

Educational psychologists will make existing reports available to the student, or their parents, to help them in their application, but do not themselves carry out assessments for the Disabled Student Allowance. Universities can often arrange this through their own Access Centres, and the British Psychological Society has a list of qualified psychologists who are available privately. This list of psychologists can be found in the Directory of Chartered Psychologists online at [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)

## How are children and young people with dyslexia identified?

Parents who suspect that their son or daughter may be dyslexic should discuss their concerns with the school.

Class and subject teachers are in a good position to recognise that a learner may be dyslexic and will choose appropriate teaching or support strategies for use within their classes. These strategies may be specific for individual learners or they may be used with a group of learners.

In primary classrooms the emphasis will be on teaching reading, spelling and writing, whereas in secondary classrooms there may be more use of compensatory strategies, for example use of a spellchecker or extra time to complete tasks in the class. These strategies are often sufficient to support most learners.

Class teachers can also ask the school's Support for Learning staff for advice and support. This may involve some additional assessment, and other strategies may be suggested.

These strategies may form part of a written plan: an Additional Support Plan or, in a small number of cases, an Individualised Educational Programme. Your views as a parent are important and you should be involved in the planning process. You may also want to help your child at home, and the school will give you advice on how to do this.

Other professionals may be involved in supporting your child, for example a speech and language therapist or occupational therapist, an educational psychologist or dyslexia support specialists. An assessment by someone external to the school is not necessary for learners to be recognised as dyslexic.

## Helping your child at home

Here are some suggestions you might try at home. Some suggestions will be more suitable for younger learners, others for learners at secondary stage. Remember that every child is different and what works for one may not work for another. You know your child best, and together you will discover what works best for you.

- \* Give praise and encouragement.
- \* Tell your child what he or she is good at. When self-esteem is low, some children are unable to identify anything they are good at, and need help.
- \* Encourage activities that interest your child.
- \* Good days and bad days are common. If a bad day follows a good one, try not to make comparisons with the day before (such as saying 'But you could spell that yesterday!').
- \* Be patient.
- \* Use a diary to communicate with school.
- \* Homework is often a real challenge. Try to be as supportive as you can and be as light-hearted as possible, and if something can be made fun all the better! Speak to the school about how long and how much homework is appropriate for your child.

### Reading

- \* Daily reading, or at least a few times a week, is best, for 10–15 minutes at a time.
- \* Try to choose a quiet place in which to read.
- \* Sit side by side.
- \* Talk about the book before you start reading.
- \* Read the story together.
- \* If your child makes a mistake, or gets stuck, give the correct word quickly, and read it again together as necessary.
- \* If your child wants to read alone, give lots of praise and support.
- \* Choose books that your child wants to read and is interested in; start with shorter stories.

Children who are reluctant to read could be encouraged to choose picture books, comic books, graphic novels, the sports page, or whatever they feel comfortable with and are interested in.

### Spelling

Practise spelling words with your children, encouraging the use of as many senses as possible: looking, saying and writing. Try colour, rhythm, rhymes, rap, singing and multi-sensory learning.

### Writing

- \* Encourage drawing, tracing and copying.
- \* Try different pens, for example gel pens, felt pens, different thicknesses of pen or pencils, Yoropens (which can be good for left handers) or pencil grips.
- \* Try lined paper.
- \* Use word-processors with a spellcheck facility.
- \* Practise keyboard skills and improve typing.

### Organisation tips

- \* Have a copy of your child's timetable.
- \* Check schoolbags for notes, homework or any forgotten items.
- \* Check the bag is packed before leaving.
- \* Help to colour code folders.
- \* Check notes are in the correct folders.
- \* Keep a wall chart of events.
- \* Check to see if the school can arrange to email homework tasks.
- \* Support your child towards independence in their organisation – this may take time!