



# Supporting a Child with *Dyslexia*:

## A Guide for Parents



# Supporting a Child with **Dyslexia**: A Guide for Parents

This guide has been written to help explain what dyslexia is and help to give you advice for supporting a child with dyslexia.



## What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a **learning difficulty** that can affect reading, writing and spelling. It is often referred to as a neurodivergence. Neurodiversity is the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioural traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population.

Dyslexia is unlike a learning disability in the way that it **does not** affect intelligence.

Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty and it is estimated that around one in every ten people in the UK have some form of dyslexia.

Dyslexia is a lifelong problem that cannot be cured but there is support available to help improve reading and writing skills to help individuals to be successful at both school and work.

## What causes dyslexia?

The exact cause of dyslexia is unknown but it appears to be genetic. It is thought that certain genes inherited by parents can act together in a way that can affect certain brain development during early life.



# Symptoms

The symptoms of dyslexia will depend on the age of your child and stage of their development. It may be harder to notice symptoms in younger children, as many of these symptoms may just be signs of slightly later development or a different learning difficulty. Here are some signs to be aware of. If you notice that your child is displaying these signs, talk to their school or GP.

## Pre-school:

- Delayed speech development
- Speech problems, such as not being able to pronounce long words correctly or jumbling up words, e.g. saying 'beddy tear' instead of 'teddy bear'
- Problems expressing themselves with spoken language or putting sentences together
- Little understanding of rhyme
- Difficulty with learning letters of the alphabet

## Primary school (between the ages of 5 - 12):

- Difficulty learning letter names and sounds
- Difficulty with spelling
- Confusing letters which look similar, e.g. 'b' and 'd'
- Confusing the order of letters in words
- Slow reading or making mistakes when reading aloud
- Having a good understanding orally but needing support to read or write down their thoughts or answers
- Having difficulty following a sequence of directions or instructions
- Needing support to learn sequences such as the alphabet, days of the week and months of the year
- Writing slowly
- Poor handwriting
- Working memory difficulties
- Needing support to copy written language
- Taking longer than their peers to complete written work
- Poor phonological awareness
- Poor organisational skills
- Difficulty interpreting timetables or telling the time



### Teenagers and adults:

- Poorly expressed written work
- Difficulty planning and writing written work, such as essays or letters
- Difficulty revising for exams
- Avoiding reading or writing tasks
- Difficulty taking notes or copying written work
- Poor spelling
- Needing support to remember things, such as PIN number or telephone number
- Needing support to meet deadlines



## Neurodiversity and Co-occurring Difficulties

Neurodiversity describes a range of specific learning difficulties (SpLD), which often have similar characteristics and can co-occur or overlap.

Some people with dyslexia may also show signs of:

- Dyscalculia
- Poor working memory
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Poor organisation and time management skills
- Dyspraxia (developmental coordination disorder)

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) recognises that dyslexia can manifest in a combination of strengths and difficulties, impacting the learning process. Individuals with dyslexia may experience visual and auditory processing challenges, yet often exhibit strengths in areas like design, problem-solving, creativity, interactive skills and oral communication.



## Diagnosis of Dyslexia

With dyslexia, it is important to try to get a diagnosis as soon as possible so that support can be put in place to help your child. However, it can be difficult to diagnose dyslexia early as the signs are not always obvious at this age.

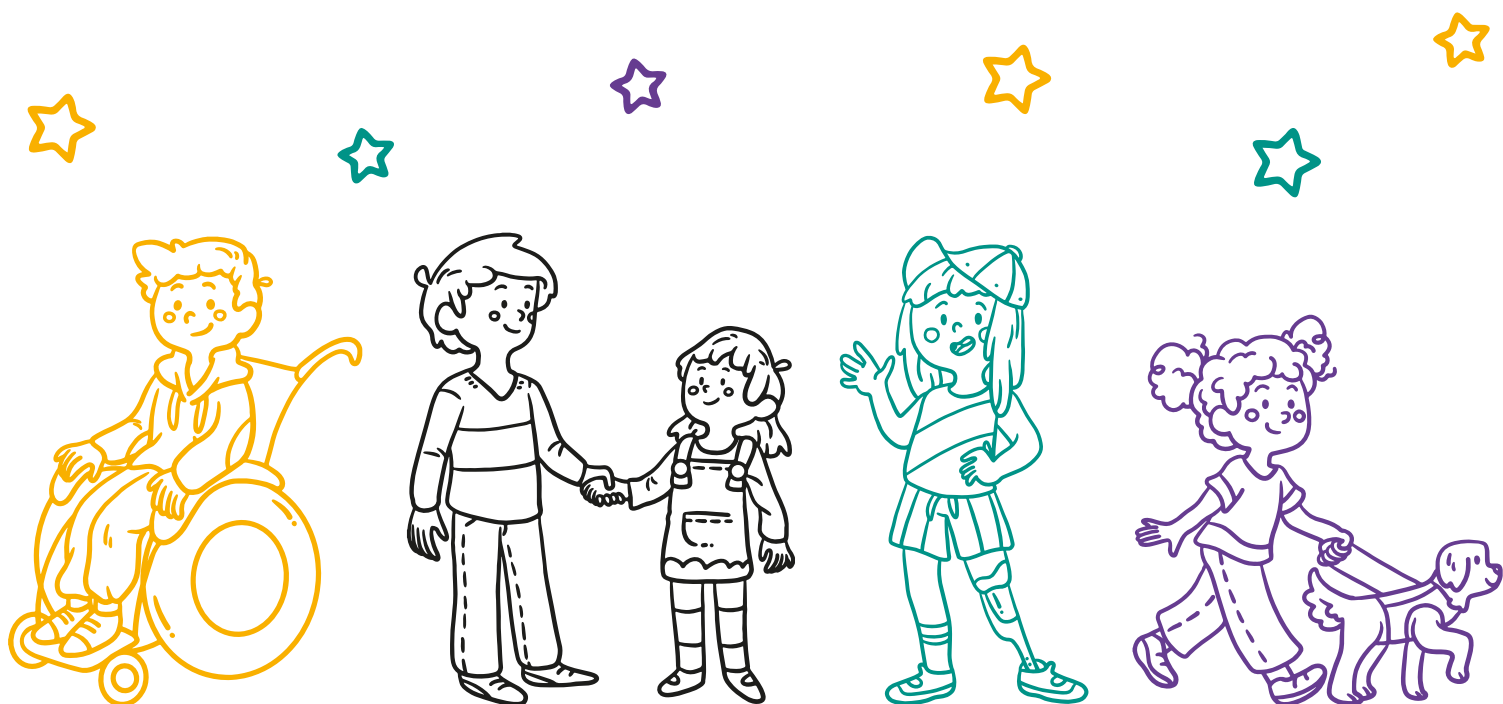
If your child is at school and you think they may have dyslexia, arrange to talk to the school's **Special Educational Needs Coordinator** (SENDCo). They will be able to advise you about the next steps and procedures in school.

The school may be able to give your child **extra support** or they may decide to request an in-depth assessment from a specialist.

This can be organised through your child's school or you can request a private assessment through an **educational psychologist** or a voluntary organisation, such as the British Dyslexia Association.

You can also take your child to see their GP. Their GP will be able to test to see if there are any other potential needs that could be affecting their ability to read and write, such as vision problems, hearing problems or other conditions, such as ADHD.

If your child does not seem to be improving with the support that has been put in place, it may be that a different approach is needed.



## Assessment

If you or your child's teacher decide to arrange an assessment for dyslexia, you will be sent a questionnaire that asks you about your child's needs.

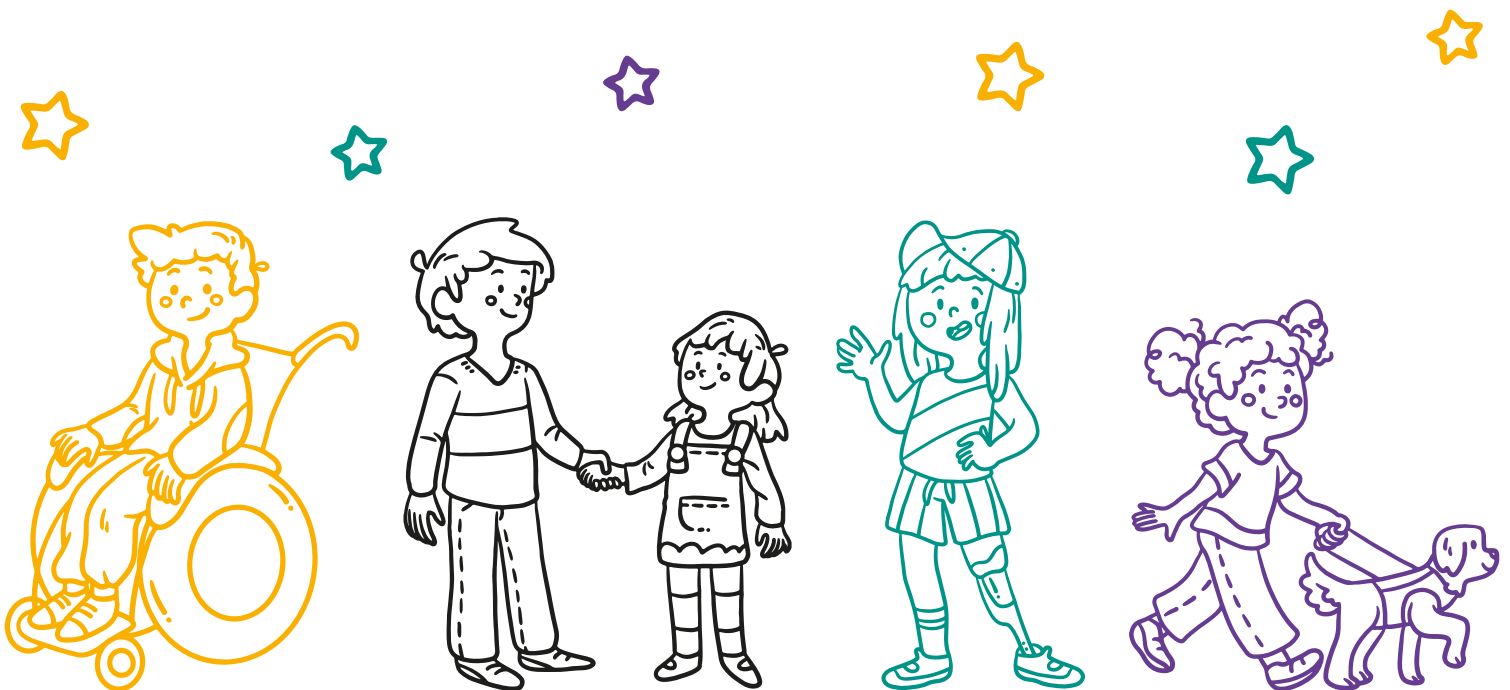
Then, during the assessment, a specialist will observe your child in their learning environment, talk to your child's teacher and ask your child to take part in a series of tests. These tests will help to determine your child's:

- reading and writing abilities
- language development
- vocabulary
- reasoning
- memory
- visual and auditory processing speed
- organisation skills
- approaches to learning



After the assessment, you will receive a report which outlines strengths and weaknesses, along with any recommendations.

Depending on the outcome of the report, it may be possible for your child to have access to extra support in school. If this is the case, your school will work with you to draw up an action plan.



## What can I do to support my child?

### Inform Your Child's School

If you think that your child may be dyslexic, inform your child's school as soon as possible so that they can determine next steps and put in place any support that your child may need at school. Monitor your child at home and keep in touch with your child's school about progress so that they can amend provisions or take further action, if needed.

### Read to Your Child

Children with dyslexia can find reading and vocabulary more difficult. Reading to your child can help to improve their vocabulary and listening skills, as well as helping them to develop a love of reading.



### Make Reading Fun

Try to help your child to develop a love of reading by making it fun. Find books that are of interest to them and enjoy stories together. You can also create a reading den or area in your home to motivate them to read.

### Multisensory Learning

Children with dyslexia can benefit from multisensory learning that involves using multiple senses. Try to plan multisensory activities to take part in with your child at home.

### Repetition

Although rereading the same book may seem boring, repetition helps children to learn and can help with both word recognition and comprehension.

## Technology

Children with dyslexia can find it hard to interpret written text and can find it easier to use technology. Find online apps or resources to help support your child with reading. They can also use technology, such as word processing programmes with a spell checker and autocorrect function, to help with writing and spelling.

## Break Down Tasks

Break down tasks into manageable steps or instructions that are easy to follow. You can also help them to do this with their school work by dividing homework into manageable chunks, such as practising a set number of spellings at a time.

## Resources and Materials

- Keep backgrounds plain and one colour. Avoid busy patterns or pictures.
- Make sure the text stands out clearly against the background.
- It's usually best to have dark writing on a light (but not bright white) background.
- Try to avoid using green, red or pink, as these colours can be hard for some people to see.
- White backgrounds on screens or paper can be very bright. Cream or soft pastel colours are often easier on the eyes. Some children with dyslexia might even prefer a specific colour.
- If you're printing, use paper that isn't shiny (matte) and is thick enough so you can't see the writing from the other side.
- Give clear instructions and avoid using double negatives.
- If your child struggles with how they hold their pencil, a pencil grip might make it more comfortable for them.
- Line up text on the left side (like a normal book) and don't stretch words to fill the whole line. This makes it easier to read and keeps the spaces between words even.
- Don't use multiple columns of text, like in a newspaper.
- Write short, simple sentences. Around 60 to 70 characters per sentence is ideal.

Find out what resources work well for your child and make sure they have these available. You can also liaise with school about this to share best practices.



## Workshops

Independent local charities may run workshops to provide support and information to help you to support your child further. They can also help to give your child a further understanding of how they can manage their individual needs.

## Be Supportive

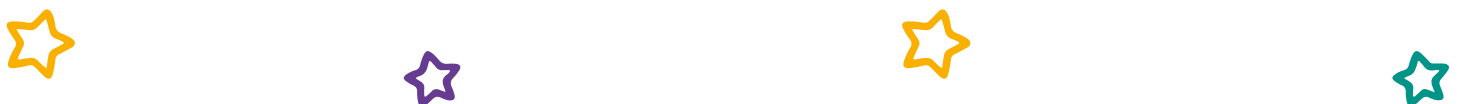
Most importantly, be supportive! Make sure that your child knows that they are loved and give them praise to encourage them and reassure them that they are doing well, regardless of any difficulties that they may face.

## Be Patient – With Your Child and Yourself

Your child needs you to be their biggest fan and their advocate. It's important not to let dyslexia become the thing they think you focus on. To nurture a positive relationship with your child, you could:

- Find out what they love doing.
- Engage in play with them.
- Show them how much you love them.
- Be there to cheer them on.
- Have fun together.

It can be easy to forget yourself due to the necessary considerations you need to give your child - you also need to look after yourself. Time away from your child can be beneficial so you don't feel overwhelmed and so that you can replenish your energy. Never feel that you are 'failing' because you're frustrated that they are finding things difficult - all parents feel this at some point. You'll never get everything right and nobody would ever expect you to - you're learning too! But remember, there is support for you too. Talking to another parent of a child with dyslexia might help to see what things work for them or even just to discuss your thoughts and feelings with them.



Disclaimer: We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation.

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