Tips for dealing with dyslexia

Michele and Pete have two bright, adorable daughters, Katie and Laura. Katie is doing well in the third grade, and Laura is in an all-day kindergarten program. Michele and Pete hoped Laura would begin kindergarten with the same skills that Katie had: a good grasp of the alphabet and letter sounds, and the ability to count to at least 100. But even as a kindergartner, Laura struggles with these tasks in a way her sister had not. Activities that involve sorting and matching shapes seem to frustrate her as well, and she is likely to give up. Her parents are spending hours trying countless strategies to help her, and are growing concerned. Could Laura have dyslexia?

What is dyslexia?

One in five people is affected by dyslexia. Our common understanding of dyslexic learners holds that they see objects and symbols in reverse. This is especially true for letters and numbers, which makes it very difficult for the dyslexic child to learn reading and math. Their altered ability is the result, rather than the cause, of what is actually going on; research shows that dyslexic students process information in a different area of the brain from their non-dyslexic peers.

How do you recognize dyslexia?

An evaluation by a professional learning specialist can determine whether or not your child is dyslexic. Below are some typical signs to help you know whether or not you should pursue evaluation and diagnosis:

- Delayed speech development
- Difficulty rhyming or pronouncing words with three or more syllables
- Difficulty following directions, particularly when more than two steps are required
- Trouble remembering sequences, e.g.,days of the week, numbers, etc.
- Inability to make connections between sounds and letters
- Switching handedness when coloring, drawing, or writing
- Difficulty learning to write
- Difficulty with fine motor activities, such as tying shoe laces

It can be difficult to spot dyslexia in pre-readers, but early diagnosis and intervention can make an important difference in your child’s progress.

Side Note: Research shows that dyslexia is hereditary. If you know of a family member—even a distant one—who is dyslexic or who has or had difficulty with reading or spelling, your child’s chances of being dyslexic are increased.

Here are a few simple, brief activities you can do with your child if you are concerned that they may be dyslexic. Although the results do not constitute a full diagnosis, it will give you valuable information to share with your pediatrician or a learning specialist.

1. Have your child match the letters in the shaded column on the left to their mates in the columns on the right:

B	A	B	D	R
E	F	S	X	E
R	T	P	R	K
S	S	R	Z	F
D	D	F	R	S

2. Play a matching game with an ordinary deck of playing cards, using only the number cards. Make note of how many matches your child can make. Play the game a few times to see if the score improves.

3. Have your child read the following words or, if they are not yet reading, have your child repeat the words after you say them:

bid dip pod pad bop dab bad bed bob dad

4. Play a game of “I Spy,” focusing on letters and small words in a children’s book or magazine.

5. Play a game of “Simon Says” with increasingly complex sets of instructions.

Dyslexia is unrelated to intelligence

Dyslexia does not signal a lack of intelligence; in fact, many people who are dyslexic are of average to above average intelligence, but their dyslexia makes it difficult to learn in traditional ways. We prefer to think of the dyslexic child as a *different* learner, rather than a *disabled* one.

In fact, dyslexic learners have a number of distinct advantages:

- They are highly creative, persistent, and easily grasp new concepts.
- They see patterns and connections that others don’t see, and are excellent puzzle-solvers.
- They see the big picture, have strong reasoning skills, and have excellent listening comprehension skills.

Individuals with dyslexia have above-average critical thinking and reasoning skills as well, and tend to succeed in careers such as science and research, carpentry, design, art and music, engineering and mechanics, athletics, and software design.

When dyslexic learners are fully empowered, recognizing and owning their own innate intelligence, the sky's the limit—and I mean that both figuratively and literally! Nearly 50% of NASA engineers are dyslexic! Dyslexia is also surprisingly common at technology universities, in particular MIT; and it is estimated that 35% of entrepreneurs and 40% of self-made millionaires are dyslexic as well. Dyslexia is common among the ranks of the highly successful, including:

- Richard Branson
- John F. Kennedy, Jr.
- Tom Cruise
- Charles Schwab
- Thomas A. Edison
- Pablo Picasso

How to help your child learn with dyslexia

Dyslexia is a blanket diagnosis. It will be important to narrow the definition surrounding your child's unique learning abilities in order to fully address them. The dyslexic child's innate problem-solving abilities and creative advantages will help them succeed outside of the classroom; however, as a parent, you will have to support your child's academic progress as well. In addition to strategies addressing the specifics of your child's cognitive path to learning, there are a few general things you can do to encourage and build confidence, ensuring that your child develops the physical, psychological, and emotional endurance to persist:

- Frame mistakes as part of the learning process; doing so helps keep your child's self-esteem and motivation intact.
- Be sure to praise your child for effort in addition to, and in some instances instead of, results. Praise merely for a good test score can set your child up for added stress when the next test comes around.
- Include eye exercises in your daily routine to strengthen your child's visual tracking ability.
- Make sure your child is getting sufficient physical exercise, too, because this supports overall health and learning.
- Handwriting and other tactile learning activities help your child make connections between seeing and understanding.
- Listening games and activities help your child develop auditory memory, which will support reading skill development.

With the incredible advances in both technology and neuroscience, we now know that dyslexia does not need to be a lifelong diagnosis. In fact, those same traits that enable adults with

dyslexia to succeed so profoundly are the same traits that enable dyslexics of all ages to build the necessary neural pathways that correct dyslexia.

When you combine the incredible creativity, ability to make connections, and innate intelligence with the neural pathways necessary for reading success, you have a child who can conquer anything!

Bridgeway's HOPE Program offers daily sensory integration therapy designed to break down the barriers that cause dyslexia and build new neural pathways in the brain that set a student up for success in reading, math, sequencing skills, executive function, and much more.
Visit http://www.bridgewayacademy.com/HOPE for more information on how you can eliminate your child's frustration!.

Additional resources

Below are links to additional resources for parents with dyslexic children:

Free video course, "How to Overcome Dyslexia"
https://www.shengchifoundation.org/ld/10-strategies-dyslexia

10 Strategies for Overcoming Dyslexia
https://lsb-files.s3.amazonaws.com/downloads/10-strategies-dyslexia.pdf

Contact information

Jessica Parnell—mom, homeschool evaluator, teacher, and president of Bridgeway Academy—is happy to provide additional guidance and support. With more than 20 years of experience as a homeschool professional, Jessica has worked with hundreds of children and families who seek alternative approaches to education. Jessica knows there is no such thing as a "cookie-cutter child," and is committed to teaching in a way that inspires children to reach for their unique potential. Jessica graduated from Kutztown University with a Bachelor of Science in Education and a Masters in English, and is currently pursuing a degree in Neuroleadership.

You can contact Jessica at Jessica@polyweb.net.

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