

What Is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a learning disorder that affects your ability to read, spell, write, and speak. Kids who have it are often smart and hardworking, but they have trouble connecting the letters they see to the sounds those letters make.

About 5% to 10% of Americans have some symptoms of dyslexia, such as slow reading, trouble spelling, or mixing up words. Adults can have this learning disorder, as well. Some people are diagnosed early in life. Others don't realize they have dyslexia until they get older.

Kids with dyslexia often have normal vision and are just as smart as their peers. But they struggle more in school because it takes them longer to read. Trouble processing words can also make it hard to spell, write, and speak clearly.

What Causes Dyslexia?

It's linked to genes, which is why the condition often runs in families. You're more likely to have dyslexia if your parents, siblings, or other family members have it.

The condition stems from differences in parts of the brain that process language. Imaging scans in people with dyslexia show that areas of the brain that should be active when a person reads don't work properly.

When children learn to read, they first figure out what sound each letter makes. For example, "B" makes a "buh" sound. "M" makes an "em" sound. Then, they learn how to put those sounds in order to form words ("C-A-T" spells "cat"). Finally, they have to figure out what words mean ("Cat" is a furry animal that meows).

For kids who have dyslexia, the brain has a hard time connecting letters to the sounds they make, and then blending those sounds into words. So to someone with dyslexia, the word "cat" might read as "tac." Because of these mix-ups, reading can be a slow and difficult process.

Dyslexia is different for everyone. Some people have a mild form that they eventually learn how to manage. Others have a little more trouble overcoming it. Even if children aren't able to fully outgrow dyslexia, they can still go to college and succeed in life.

What Are the Symptoms of Dyslexia?

The symptoms of dyslexia can be hard to spot until your child starts school. A teacher might be the first one to notice the signs, especially if your child struggles to read, spell, and follow instructions in the classroom.

Dyslexia symptoms change at different ages and stages of life. Each child with dyslexia is different, has unique strengths, and faces distinct challenges. Yet there are some general signs that your child might need some extra help in school.

Symptoms in Preschoolers

Children with dyslexia have trouble processing language. Preschoolers who have this learning disorder lag behind their peers in language skills. They take longer to speak and write than their friends, and they sometimes get their letters and words mixed up.

Preschoolers with dyslexia may show signs like these:

They find it hard to learn or remember the letters of the alphabet.

They mispronounce familiar words. "Baby talk" is common.

They have trouble recognizing letters. For example, they mistake "t" for "d."

They don't recognize rhyming patterns, like "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall / Humpty Dumpty had a great fall."

Symptoms in Grade-Schoolers

- The signs of dyslexia become more obvious in elementary school. Kids with this disorder have a harder time learning how to read and write than their classmates.
- Grade-schoolers with dyslexia:
 - Read more slowly than other kids their age
 - Can't tell the difference between certain letters or words
 - Don't connect letters with the sounds they make -- "buh" for "b" or "em" for "m"
 - Write letters or numbers backwards, such as "b" instead of "d"
 - Have trouble sounding out words when they read
 - Can't always understand what they've read
 - Write slowly
 - Misspell words -- even easy words like "and" and "dog"
 - Say that words on the page appear to blur or jump around
 - Struggle to follow a series of instructions

Symptoms in Older Children

Kids who were able to hide their symptoms in elementary school might start to have trouble in middle school as the demands on them increase. They can also withdraw socially as it becomes harder for them to communicate with their peers.

Middle and high school students with dyslexia:

- Have trouble writing clearly (make errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation)
- Take a long time to finish their homework or complete tests
- Have messy handwriting
- Speak slowly
- Avoid reading aloud
- Use the wrong words -- like "furnish" instead of "finish" or "lotion" for "ocean"
- Can't remember the names of words, so they might say "um" or "uh" a lot

If your child has these symptoms, talk to her teacher to find out what's happening in the classroom.

Then call your child's doctor to make sure a health problem like hearing loss or vision loss isn't to blame. If dyslexia is the cause, your doctor can refer you to a specialist for more tests and treatment. The earlier your child gets diagnosed, the sooner she can start treatment to bring her language and writing skills up to speed.

If Your Child Has Dyslexia: Tips for Parents

When you find out your child has dyslexia, you naturally want to do everything you can to help him. But you might feel pulled in a million different directions.

One of the best ways to get started is to find out as much as you can about the learning disability. When you see just how much you can do for your child, it may ease some of your fears and guide you to make more informed choices. Make sure that these sources for learning are trusted, such as those provided by your psychologist.

Next, you'll want to work closely with your child's school to make sure all the right services and resources are in place. There should be a support team helping to create an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** for your child. This will provide classroom accommodations and extra support to facilitate learning. You could ask about the qualifications of the teachers to support your child's learning and you may want to research schools designed for dyslexic students. You could research summer or weekend reading programs. The earlier you start, the better it will be for your child.

And then there's the day-to-day stuff -- the many ways you can support not just learning and schoolwork, but also your child's confidence. It's tough to struggle at something that seems to come easily to other kids. This is the tricky line you have to walk. You need to be firm about schoolwork and routine, but make sure to show constant love, support, and patience.

Reading

Each kid is unique and learns in different ways, so use what you know about your child's strengths and weaknesses. There's no perfect recipe, but it usually involves a lot of practice,

routine, love, and support. Remember to ask your psychologist about reading programs and strategies to reinforce at home.

Read. A lot. There are all kinds of ways to support your child's reading. Try some of these ideas:

Listen to audio books and have your child read along with them.

Make sure he spends some time reading alone, both quietly and aloud.

Re-read his favorite books. It may be a little boring for you, but it helps him learn.

Take turns reading books aloud together.

Talk about the stories you read together and ask questions like, "What do you think happens next?"

Use schoolbooks, but you can also branch out into graphic novels and comic books, too. Reading things your child is interested in or excited about can be motivating.

And don't forget that you need to read on your own, too. You'll act as a role model and show that reading can be enjoyable. While your child reads quietly, you can do the same.

Make learning playful. It always helps when learning doesn't feel like work. A few ideas:

- Make up songs, poems, and even dances to help remember things.
- Play word games.
- If your child is younger, use nursery rhymes and play silly rhyming games.

Schoolwork

- **Work closely with your child's school.** You may need to push to get the services your child needs. Make sure to work with the school to set up an IEP that spells out your child's needs and helps you track progress.
- **Use technology.** With tablets, smartphones, and computers, you'll have a lot of helpful tools as your child gets older. Online dictionaries, spell-check, and text-to-speech software can make a big difference in your child's progress, as long as the assignment allows for their use.
- **Keep schoolwork organized.** Staying organized is hard when you have dyslexia. Help your child break big tasks into smaller chunks. Then, work together on a system to keep track of schoolwork. For example, you might use different-colored folders for class notes versus homework, or a giant calendar to keep track of due dates. For older kids, reminders and alarms on smartphones, tablets, and computers can play a role, too.

Emotional Support

As with many parenting challenges, it's helpful to be firm, patient, and positive. You also want to give your child time to do things besides schoolwork. If it's all work, all the time, it'll wear

both of you down. Plus, you want your child to see that he's not defined by dyslexia, that he's skilled and smart in many ways.

You can also:

Celebrate successes. Take a day at the end of a project or after a big test to have fun together.

Don't expect perfection. A lot of times, close enough is a huge success.

Help your child understand what dyslexia is. He should know that it's not his fault and you'll work through it together.

Let your kid do activities he's good at and enjoys. This can balance the struggles with schoolwork.

Praise your child's strength and skills. Don't let learning struggles be the main focus

Remind your child that lots of wildly talented people have (or had) dyslexia, from Albert Einstein to Whoopi Goldberg.

Tell him "I love you" often.

Also, remember that you set the tone. Your child's dyslexia may be challenging for you, but your own positive attitude will catch on. You can show that you make mistakes and struggle, but you also push through.

Dyslexia Resources

<https://dyslexiaida.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/decodingdyslexiaga/>

<https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/Dyslexia.aspx>

<https://dyslexiaida.org/dyslexia-basics/>

<https://www.atlantaparent.com/learning-differences-find-help/>