



INDICATORS OF DYSLEXIA

Compiled by Amanda Hornby

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Amanda Hornby

amandah@bdadyslexia.org.uk

Indicators of dyslexia

Early Years and Foundation Stage

The following indicators may suggest that your child has a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) such as dyslexia. Many young children will display these behaviours and make these mistakes. It is the severity of the behaviour and the length of time it persists which give vital clues to identifying a difficulty such as dyslexia.

Indicators

- Difficulty learning nursery rhymes
- Difficulty paying attention, sitting still, listening to stories
- Likes listening to stories but shows no interest in letters or words
- Difficulty learning to sing or recite the alphabet
- A history of slow speech development
- Muddles words e.g. cucumber, flutterby
- Difficulty keeping simple rhythm
- Finds it hard to carry out two or more instructions at one time, (e.g. put the toys in the box, then put it on the shelf) but is fine if tasks are presented in smaller units
- Forgets names of friends, teacher, colours etc.
- Poor auditory discrimination
- Confusion between directional words e.g. up/down
- Family history of dyslexia/reading difficulties
- Difficulty with sequencing e.g. coloured beads, classroom routines
- Substitutes words e.g. "lampshade" for "lamppost"
- Appears not to be listening or paying attention
- Obvious 'good' and 'bad' days for no apparent reason

Next steps

There is a large body of research linking speech and language difficulties in early childhood to later literacy problems. Identifying potential speech and language problems as early as possible is really important as much can be done before a child starts school to develop their language skills. This will then support their reading development at school.

If you are worried about your child's speech and language development, speak to your GP or health visitor. If you think your child may be dyslexic,

discuss your concerns with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) in your child's early years setting. Early help is vital to reduce the chance of loss of confidence and low self-esteem. A child can only be diagnosed with dyslexia through a Diagnostic Assessment but these are usually only carried out from 7 years old.

More information

[Dyslexia: Early Identification \(BDA, 2012\)](#) is available from the BDA shop.

[Early Help Better Future: A Guide to the Early Recognition of Dyslexia](#) by Jean Augur

[Understanding and supporting neurodiversity: Support strategies for families and carers](#), BDA 2017

Primary aged children

If a child appears to be struggling with spelling, reading, writing or numeracy, how do you know whether these difficulties are potential indications of dyslexia?

There are some obvious signs such as a 'spiky' profile which means that a child has areas of strong ability alongside areas of weakness. You may also have other family members with similar weaknesses. Remember that not all dyslexic children will display the same weaknesses and abilities.

General signs to look for are:

- Speed of processing: slow spoken and/or written language
- Poor concentration
- Difficulty following instructions
- Forgetting words

Written work

- Poor standard of written work compared with oral ability
- Produces messy work with many crossings out and words tried several times, e.g. wippe, wype, wiep, wipe
- Confused by letters which look similar, particularly b/d, p/g, p/q, n/u, m/w
- Poor handwriting with many 'reversals' and badly formed letters
- Spells a word several different ways in one piece of writing
- Makes anagrams of words, e.g. tired for tried, bread for beard
- Produces badly set-out written work, doesn't stay close to the margin
- Poor pencil grip
- Produces phonetic and bizarre spelling: not age/ability appropriate
- Uses unusual sequencing of letters or words

Reading

- Slow reading progress
- Finds it difficult to blend letters together
- Has difficulty in establishing syllable division or knowing the beginnings and endings of words
- Unusual pronunciation of words
- No expression in reading, and poor comprehension
- Hesitant and laboured reading, especially when reading aloud

- Misses out words when reading, or adds extra words
- Fails to recognise familiar words
- Loses the point of a story being read or written
- Has difficulty in picking out the most important points from a passage

Numeracy

- Confusion with place value e.g. units, tens, hundreds
- Confused by symbols such as + and x signs
- Difficulty remembering anything in a sequential order, e.g. tables, days of the week, the alphabet

Time

- Has difficulty learning to tell the time
- Poor time keeping
- Poor personal organisation
- Difficulty remembering what day of the week it is, their birth date, seasons of the year, months of the year
- Difficulty with concepts – yesterday, today, tomorrow

Skills

- Poor motor skills, leading to weaknesses in speed, control and accuracy of the pencil
- Memory difficulties e.g. for daily routines, self-organisation, rote learning
- Confused by the difference between left and right, up and down, east and west
- Indeterminate hand preference
- Performs unevenly from day to day

Behaviour

- Uses work avoidance tactics, such as sharpening pencils and looking for books
- Seems 'dreamy', does not seem to listen
- Easily distracted
- Is the class clown or is disruptive or withdrawn
- Is excessively tired due to amount of concentration and effort required

A cluster of these indicators alongside areas of ability may suggest dyslexia and further investigation may be required.

Next steps

If you suspect that your child may be dyslexic then you should discuss your concerns with your child's teacher, or the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo).

A teacher should consult the school's SENCo to discuss the next steps and appropriate support. The SEND Code of Practice states that if a teacher suspects that a learner has special educational needs (SEN) then they must inform the child's parents and include them in discussions about what is the best support for their child. They must also tell parents about any special educational provision that is made for their child.

It is advised that appropriate support is put in place as soon as a need is identified. A Diagnostic Assessment is not needed in order for SEN Support to be provided. However, dyslexia can only be formally identified through a Diagnostic Assessment.

To find out more about assessments visit the [BDA Diagnostic Assessment](#) webpage.

More information

[Understanding and supporting neurodiversity: Support strategies for parents and carers](#), BDA 2018

Secondary aged students

Dyslexia is a combination of abilities as well as difficulties. It is the disparity between them that is often the give-away clue. A dyslexic learner, despite certain areas of difficulty, may be orally very able and knowledgeable, creative, artistic, or sporting. Alongside these abilities will be a cluster of difficulties - these will be different for every person.

Dyslexia can only be diagnosed through a Diagnostic Assessment. However, there are indicators which can help you to identify a young person who may be dyslexic.

Written work

- Has a poor standard of written work compared with oral ability
- Has poor handwriting with badly formed letters or has neat handwriting, but writes very slowly
- Produces badly set out or messy written work, with spellings crossed out several times
- Spells the same word differently in one piece of work
- Has difficulty with punctuation and/or grammar
- Confuses upper and lower case letters
- Writes a great deal but 'loses the thread'
- Writes very little, but to the point
- Has difficulty taking notes in lessons
- Has difficulty with organisation of homework
- Finds tasks difficult to complete on time
- Appears to know more than they can commit to paper

Reading

- Is hesitant and laboured, especially when reading aloud
- Omits, repeats or adds extra words
- Reads at a reasonable rate, but has a low level of comprehension
- Fails to recognise familiar words
- Misses a line or repeats the same line twice
- Loses their place easily/uses a finger or marker to keep the place
- Has difficulty in pin-pointing the main idea in a passage
- Has difficulty using dictionaries, directories, encyclopaedias

Numeracy

- Has difficulty remembering tables and/or basic number sets
- Finds sequencing problematic
- Confuses signs such as x for +
- Can think at a high level in mathematics, but needs a calculator for simple calculations
- Misreads questions that include words
- Finds mental arithmetic at speed very difficult
- Finds memorising formulae difficult

Other areas

- Confuses direction - left/right
- Has difficulty in learning foreign languages
- Has difficulty in finding the name for an object
- Has clear difficulties processing information at speed
- Misunderstands complicated questions
- Finds holding a list of instructions in memory difficult, although can perform all tasks when told individually

Behaviour

- Is disorganised or forgetful e.g. over sports equipment, lessons, homework, appointments
- Is easily distracted. May find it difficult to remain focused on the task
- Is often in the wrong place at the wrong time
- Is excessively tired, due to the amount of concentration and effort required

A cluster of these indicators alongside areas of ability may point to possible dyslexia and further investigation is recommended.

Next steps

If you suspect that your child may be dyslexic then you should discuss this with your child's teacher or the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo).

If a teacher is concerned that a learner may have dyslexia or have any other SpLD, then they should consult the school's SENCo to discuss a plan of action.

It is important that appropriate support is put in place as soon as a need is identified, rather than waiting for a formal identification.

Under the SEND Code of Practice, if a teacher suspects that a child has special educational needs (SEN) then they must inform a child's parents and include them in discussions about what is the best support for their child. The school must also tell the parents of any special educational provision that is made for their child.

Dyslexia can only be formally identified through a Diagnostic Assessment but this is not needed in order for the young person to receive support. You can find out more about [Diagnostic Assessments on the BDA Assessment](#) webpage.

More information

[Understanding and support neurodiversity: Support strategies for parents and carers](#), BDA 2018

Everyone's experience of dyslexia will be individual to them but there are common indicators. A cluster of these indicators alongside abilities in other areas could suggest dyslexia, and should be investigated further.

Do you:

- Confuse visually similar words such as cat and cot
- Spell erratically
- Find it hard to scan or skim text
- Read/write slowly
- Need to re-read paragraphs to understand them
- Find it hard to listen and maintain focus
- Find it hard to concentrate if there are distractions
- Feel sensations of mental overload/switching off
- Have difficulty telling left from right
- Get confused when given several instructions at once
- Have difficulty organising thoughts on paper
- Often forget conversations or important dates
- Have difficulty with personal organisation, time management and prioritising tasks
- Avoid certain types of work or study
- Find some tasks really easy but unexpectedly challenged by others

- Have poor self-esteem, especially if dyslexic difficulties have not been identified in earlier life

If you feel this reflects you, you can get an indication if you may be dyslexic from our [adult dyslexia checklist](#) and/or a [dyslexia screener](#). These are not a diagnostic tool but can also be used to indicate whether further investigations should take place.

If a checklist and/or screener indicates you are likely to be dyslexic, a formal Diagnostic Assessment is the only way to confirm whether or not the difficulties you encounter are due to dyslexia. A formal diagnosis will, in turn, help you to get the right support within the education system, and in the workplace. Find out more on the [BDA Assessments webpage](#).