

Indicators of Dyslexia

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The shifting focus of definitions of dyslexia continues to alert us to the fact that we are dealing with more than a reading, writing and spelling problem. Recent definitions pinpoint difficulties with organisation, memory, word retrieval and speed of processing. Sir Jim Rose's definition stresses that the condition exists on a continuum ranging from mild to severe; thus we are unsurprised that all dyslexics are not identified in the early years. It is encouraging that most recent definitions emphasise the abilities and strengths of dyslexic profiles.

So, our picture of indicators of dyslexia may be different at different stages in the education of people with dyslexia. The lesson we learn from our increased understanding of dyslexia is that information about cerebellar difficulties prompts us to check out complications with timing, sequencing, naming speed and general levels of automaticity of skills over and above literacy difficulties. The environment will determine when and where these difficulties become apparent.

Moving from pre-primary to primary education, children may suffer information overload with copious amounts of listening. Listening and general receptive and expressive language skills need to be in place before children are ready to learn literacy skills. Many children fail to learn phonics because the

underpinning knowledge of phonological skills is not in place. During the primary years children are expected to make the transition from **learning to read** to **reading to learn**.

Other signs of possible dyslexia in the early years include;

- seemingly bright in many ways but slow to acquire spelling/reading/writing.
- late speech and language development
- pronunciation problems
- grammatical errors in speech
- word finding problems
- difficulty learning nursery rhymes and unable to give rhymes
- history of hearing problems e.g. earache and glue ear
- allergies e.g. hay fever, asthma
- confusing letters and numbers that are similar m/w, 6/9, etc
- difficulty learning tables and number bonds
- difficulty learning to tell the time and learning the language of time such as “ten past two”
- clumsiness in small actions such as handwriting or drawing, or in large actions such as learning to ride a bike or throwing and catching balls
- difficulties in learning letter formation and confusing upper and lowercase letters
- difficulties in learning spellings with omission of letters and syllables or using the correct letters but in the wrong order
- Poor attention or concentration for activities involving the reading, writing, listening
- problems remembering more than one instruction at a time
- difficulty learning the alphabet ,days of the week, months of the year
- difficulty learning the letter sound links

- difficulty detecting alliteration or giving the words which start the same sound
- difficulties learning a sequence activities such as tying shoelaces or doing up buttons
- talents in creative areas such as playing with Lego

At secondary level, earlier difficulties may persist as well as new problems in coping with the increased demands of the curriculum. They may show many of the following features:

Reading

- inaccuracies, for example when reading examination questions
- poor speed of reading
- poor skimming and scanning
- difficulty in getting the main idea
- reading silently may be easier for comprehension than reading aloud
- difficulties coping with heavier reading demands

Writing

- persistent spelling difficulties
- difficulties in copying from the board
- difficulty organising and structuring written work
- choosing simple vocabulary that is easier to spell
- difficulty in spotting errors and proofreading
- problems with legibility and speed of handwriting
- difficulty with punctuation

Listening

- problems with note-taking, unable to listen and write at the same time
- difficulty in following more than one instruction at a time
- difficulty with concentration and attention

Language

- verbally may be good, thus a discrepancy between oral and written skills
- word retrieval problems
- difficulty in acquisition of topic words
- slow to answer questions
- unable to cope with a fast pace of verbal input, particularly if the sentence structure is complex
- more easily distracted by environmental noise

Organisation

- poor organisational skills, e.g. problems with having the right equipment and materials, timekeeping and meeting deadlines
- problems coping with more homework and lengthier assignments; often unsure of the precise requirements of homework set
- difficulty in satisfying the demands of a number of teachers

General

- difficulties with memory
- more easily tired than peers because of failure to achieve automaticity with many everyday activities
- more prone to examination stress
- difficulty with studying for languages, in particular, French
- often better at practical subjects where less reading and writing is involved
- low self-esteem, leading possibly to behaviour problems and truancy.

Warning

Parents may look at these indicators and be unduly concerned when they spot some of these features in their children. It is worth remembering the quotation below.

“It is a most extraordinary thing, but I never read a patent medicine advertisement without being impelled to the

conclusion that I am suffering from the particular disease therein dealt with in its most virulent form. The diagnosis seems in every case to correspond exactly with all the sensations that I have ever felt.” Jerome K Jerome Three Men in a Boat

Tim Miles described dyslexia as a pattern of difficulties; observant parents might look out for the persistence of difficulties over a period of time but also consider other at risk factors such as a family history of similar difficulties as well as talents in mathematical, computer, design, musical, mechanical or creative fields.

It is also worth considering whether other barriers to learning may have caused or be causing difficulties; medical conditions, illness leading to absence from school, being young in the school year, lack of opportunities for developing literacy skills at home, such as being brought up in a bilingual family or having foreign carers. This is not an either/or situation but these other factors should be taken into account.

Conclusion

Because dyslexia can exist on a continuum from mild to severe, difficulties may not be noticed in the early years particularly with bright children who may unconsciously be compensating for difficulties. Sometimes, these children may draw attention to themselves not through their difficulties but through avoidance strategies such as a reluctance to attend school or unacceptable behaviour in the classroom. This is unsurprising as it is easier to ascribe failure to a lack of effort; children who are awarded A for effort and E for attainment will often consider themselves stupid. This can also happen through family dynamics where younger siblings find achievement much easier.

It is now generally recognised that people with dyslexia often have co-occurring difficulties such as dyspraxia and ADHD. Often the symptoms may look similar; for example the dyslexic

pupil may look as if he has attention deficit when the explanation may well be that he is finding it difficult to attend because of the nature of the task he is dealing with.

There is still controversy over the visual processing problems that dyslexic pupils may have; in our experience, some dyslexics will manifest signs of difficulty which reduce their ability to deal with print easily. Probing visual processing is recommended in assessment; parents can experiment with coloured overlays or simply coloured plastic sheets available from stationers to explore whether this makes the reading process easier for their children.