

Literacy Difficulties (Dyslexia) Information Pack for Parents and Carers.



A guide to supporting young people with literacy difficulties (dyslexia) at home and in school.



If you are reading this booklet you are likely to be researching information as a parent or carer of a young person that may have dyslexia.

We appreciate that supporting a young person with a learning barrier can be confusing and stressful. We would like to work together to ensure your child is accessing the correct level of support, at home and in school, in order to meet their potential.

This document is designed to provide information and strategies to help you feel confident in working together with your child and your child's school to ensure a smooth learning journey.

WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

Dyslexia is a DIFFERENCE not a disability

Literacy is a human invention and not all brains construct a reading circuit that flows easily.

Dyslexia is NOT a medical condition, but rather depicts a different brain organisation.

Dyslexia is not linked to intelligence or motivation; this organisational difference causes reading and writing to be more difficult.

Every brain is unique. Every form of dyslexia is different, but there will be some common threads.

Strengths of a dyslexic brain:

These can include being great conversationalists, creative, imaginative, empathetic, having good spatial awareness and being positive at problem solving.

Many successful people have also struggled to read and write. This did not affect their ability to achieve.

FUN FACT!

Jamie Oliver, the British chef whose cookbooks, cooking shows and restaurants are beloved the world over was diagnosed with dyslexia early on in life and had to overcome many challenges to learn how to read. He now actively speaks about his own experiences and the positive traits that he associates with dyslexia - including his creative flair and keen business sense.

Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) / Literacy difficulties (Dyslexia)

Dyslexia can be referred to as a specific learning difficulty, although research has shown that it is not necessarily 'specific' to a certain area of cognition or learning (Kaufman, 1994; Turner, 1997; Elliot, 1998). At Cardiff Inclusion Service, we do not use the term specific learning difficulty, but instead, we adopt the term Literacy Difficulties (dyslexia). This reflects our belief that meeting the criteria for dyslexia does not require a young person to have a particular cognitive profile or to have a discrepancy between their literacy skills and other areas of their development.

(Dyslexia Guidance, Cardiff Inclusion Service, 2022)

You may have come across confusing messages regarding what defines dyslexia. Cardiff adopts the widely agreed definition drawn up by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 1999) which states:

Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the 'word level' and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities. It provides the basis for a staged process of assessment through teaching.

As the definition suggests, appropriate opportunities to learn are vital when supporting an individual with literacy difficulties (dyslexia) and we want to work with you to ensure these are in place for your child.

Every individual is different and the spectrum for a learner with literacy difficulties (dyslexia) is very broad. Adjustments and modifications for learning will be different for each young person dependent on their individual needs and setting.

A dyslexic learner will experience challenges in: -

- Reading at word level and/or spelling - these need to be monitored over time.



A young person facing these challenges on a daily basis may find they have reduced self-esteem and loss of confidence in their ability. It is vital for us to celebrate their successes in life, including learning, no matter how small.

DID YOU KNOW?

John Lennon, the lead singer of the Beatles and the author of some of the most famous songs ever to be broadcast over the radio, had dyslexia. He struggled with reading and spelling at school yet did well in subjects where he could express his creativity.

WHAT TO DO IF I THINK MY CHILD HAS DYSLEXIA?

If you have concerns that your child is dyslexic, please talk to their class teacher in the first instance.

As a school, we will be looking to identify and address any barriers to learning that are specific to the individual young person through a person-centred approach.

There is no particular cognitive profile nor is there a single test/screener that can identify dyslexia. Dyslexia occurs across all ability levels.

Whilst it may appear helpful to identify dyslexia and therefore explain why a child experiences literacy difficulties, a diagnosis should be sought with caution. Research shows that 'those labelled with dyslexia hold lower beliefs about their ability in English and Maths than their matched peers without this label. The children labelled with dyslexia were also significantly less likely to say that they would go to university.' Furthermore, teachers and parents hold 'lower aspirations for children labelled with dyslexia.'

(Knight, C. 2021, p.1110)

The school can provide assessments to identify any gaps in learning and create the appropriate support each young person requires to make their expected progress.

Whilst as a parent/carer you may choose to commission a full assessment which will provide a detailed report of the strengths and challenges of the individual and provide recommendations for support, this will not change the support your child is entitled to receive in school.



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP



It is vital that your child feels happy and safe in school.

By working together, we can communicate concerns, alleviate fears and put in place the stepping stones for your child to overcome any barriers and make positive progress in their learning.

If you are concerned about your child having literacy difficulties (dyslexia)

- Communicate your concerns with the class teacher.
- Try to pinpoint the areas your child has specific difficulties.
- If required, book a meeting to discuss concerns further.
- Agree action points with a timeframe and a future meeting if required.

WHAT I CAN EXPECT FROM MY CHILD'S SCHOOL?

We are here to support you. Our aim is to be a well-resourced 'Dyslexia Friendly School' where strategies are inclusive and supportive and allow your child to learn in class with their peers, feeling secure in their ability. It is vital to remember that not all classrooms are the same. We hope to do this by working positively together.

You can expect:-

- Positive communication with class teachers, support staff and the ALNCo, where appropriate.
- Effective communication between staff .
- A discussion around modified and/or differentiated strategies for your child, which may include:-

Modified worksheets and handouts	An adjustment to whiteboard displays	Use of assistive technology
Word bank or glossary of subject specific terms	A One Page Profile listing strategies and challenges	A coloured overlay
Clarified or simplified instructions	Highlighted information / Highlighters	Reading guide
A combination of visual and verbal information	Additional time to complete tasks or homework	Use of a laptop
Work on self-esteem		Adjustment of the seating plan
		Practice activities

How can I help my child at home?

Be understanding:

Remember that your child may be working harder than their classmates or siblings. They may come home tired or frustrated and possibly angry with themselves and others. It is important to recognise their efforts and validate their feelings.

Be encouraging:

You have a tremendous influence on your child's attitude to learning. Remind them that everyone is good at something. Support your child to find their individual areas of strength and interest, this may be outside of what school can offer.

- Your child's success will be greatly increased if they feel confident.
- If they feel confident then they will keep trying.

Be patient:

- Try to promote home being a reassuring and supportive place.
- Allow time to relax - your child will be tired after trying to keep up all day.
- Give hints and reminders - being tired can make short term memory worse.

Homework:

Homework can be a frustrating time for both parents and students. The main challenges will come from lack of organisation, recalling instructions and ability to concentrate. It is rarely about the child's ability to complete the homework set.

There are strategies that every parent can put in place to support their child's learning with regards to homework.

- Ensure that small successes are celebrated - Your child is likely to have low self-confidence and will need constant reassurance that they can succeed.
- Establish a routine - Encourage your child to keep a checklist and to write down what needs to be prioritised before the next day.
- Go through instructions together - Remain praise focused and prepare together before your child starts work.
- If your child has trouble recording homework please discuss this with school.
- Encourage your child to check their work using spellcheck, if using a laptop, or read through it together.
- Help your child to keep organised with colour coded tasks and folders for dedicated subjects.
- Note frequent mistakes on a separate list and use this list as a check point for future tasks and share with subject teacher.
- Be realistic about the time your child takes to complete homework. Discuss concerns about how long homework takes with the class teacher.
- Try doing homework in short blocks of 15 - 20 minutes to improve concentration.

Reading:

The effort needed to concentrate on reading can be exhausting and can often lead to frustration and a reluctance to learn.

- Try paired reading with your child where you read together and support them through the difficult words or passages.
- Read at your child's pace and select reading material that is suited to your child's interest and ability.
- Discuss what you have read together to check understanding.

- E-readers may be useful. An ordinary page of text can be split into several pages, and you can adjust the font type, size and spacing, and the brightness of the screen.
- Screen readers and reading pens are also available to convert the text to speech.
- Young people who enjoy literature but find reading challenging may respond well to an audio book, especially for texts that require reading for examination. Ensure you refer back to the text at key points so your child can make notes that they may refer back to at a later date.

Spelling:

There are some simple activities you can do with your child to help strengthen their spelling:

- We don't correct every mistake but rather we focus on some words to develop at a time. We even have some words that the child can read/write (to build confidence) with some words they are working at learning.
- Use a highlighter to support your child to highlight sections of words they find particularly challenging to remember.
- Use flashcards, matching games or magnetic words/letters to familiarise your child with words and build the words together.
- Discuss how we can find smaller words in the bigger word, for example 'there is a hen in when'
- Go over the rules of spelling together, e.g. a 'q' is always followed by a 'u'. Discuss with your child's subject teacher the rules and word banks they teach for that specific subject.
- Help your child to understand words are made up of sounds and syllables. Say a word and ask how many sounds/syllables there are. Help your child to spell each sound/syllable at a time.

Handwriting:

- The key to improving handwriting is consistent practice.

- Keep to short timed sessions so your child is able to maintain concentration without becoming bored or uncomfortable
- Some students prefer a slanted writing surface
- Some individuals may need support to practice the tripod* (mature) writing grip. There are ergonomic products available which can help young people who find holding a pen or pencil uncomfortable
- Hand exercises can help to strengthen the muscles in your child's hand which could improve their handwriting.
- Your child may prefer to use a laptop. This may also require practice and should be communicated with school so that the student may use a device for lessons and examinations.

Be part of your child's Support Network

Finally, yet most importantly, your role as parent or carer to your child is vital and unique. An individual with literacy difficulties (dyslexia) needs a strong support network around them to enable them to persevere and attempt new challenges. Your key role is to build their sense of belonging and self-worth, feeling valued and loved. Literacy is a one skill of many which needs to be learnt and developed. Encourage your child to take part in other activities outside school, build a strong network of friends and explore other interests.

Develop a positive partnership with the school, not only to support literacy tasks but other activities e.g. sport, art, trips.

Resources

Dyslexia Guidance. Cardiff Local Authority Inclusion Service, Feb 2022

Possible books that may be useful (there are many more available):

- 'Fish in a tree' by Lynda Mullaly Hunt
- 'Dyslexia is my superpower (most of the time)' by Margaret Rooke
- 'The Power of Neurodiversity' by Thomas Armstrong may be a useful book for adults to read who would like to explore this topic in more detail.
- Dyslexia Wrestling with an Octopus by Beth Hamish
- So you think you've got problems by Rosalind Birkett, published by Egon Publishers Ltd. (ISBN 0905858859)
- Dyslexia: Talking it Through (Suitable for 8-11 yrs) by Althea Braithwaite, published by Happy Cat Books (ISBN 1903285550).
- My name is (Brain) Brian by Jenny Betancourt, published by Scholastic Paperbacks (US) (ISBN 0590449222).

References:

Dyslexia Guidance, Cardiff Inclusion Service, 2022

Knight, C (2021) The impact of the dyslexia label on academic outlook and aspirations: An analysis using propensity score matching. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, **91**, 1110-1126.