



Reading Difficulties and Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that affects the skills needed to read words quickly and accurately. Dyslexia can also affect writing and spelling.

Literacy – reading, writing and understanding – is the foundation for all learning. Identifying students with reading difficulties as early as possible, including dyslexia, is important to their learning in all areas. Students can then be given the support they need to keep up with their classmates and take part in all the learning opportunities at school.

Typical Features of Dyslexia

Dyslexia usually includes difficulty with:

- Hearing and being able to manipulate the separate sounds in words (phonological awareness)
- Remembering, for a short time, a list of words, numbers or instructions (verbal memory)
- Being able to quickly process familiar letters, words, digits or numbers (verbal processing speed).

Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the separate sounds within words (phonemes) and is a key foundation skill for early reading and spelling development. An example of phonological awareness is understanding that if the 'p' in 'pat' is changed to an 's' the word becomes 'sat'.

When reading, if a child has problems with phonological awareness they might have difficulty recognising that sounds can be represented by letters or groups of letters within written words (this is often called phonics at school).

Verbal memory awareness

Verbal memory is the ability to remember an ordered sequence of words or numbers for a short period of time. For example, it is used to remember a list of words, numbers or instructions.

Verbal processing speed

Verbal processing speed is the time taken to process familiar information, such as words, letters and numbers.

Difficulty in these areas can be detected at an early age. However, these difficulties may not be noticed until a child struggles with learning to read in the first years of school. If your child can see and hear clearly, doesn't have an intellectual disability and displays some of the difficulties above they may have dyslexia.

Strategies to Support your Child

The following strategies can be used to support your child:

- Understanding dyslexia and how it affects reading and writing is an important first step towards helping your child.
- Talk to your child's school and teachers. Developing a plan together to support your child will give them the best possible opportunity for improvement.
- Supporting your child at home, helping them with their homework and using strategies worked out with your school to help them improve their reading and writing skills.

Talking to Teachers at your Child's School

How schools can help

If you have concerns about your child's reading, talk to the teacher first. Working with your child's teacher is important if your child is dyslexic. The school will identify your child's strengths and reading needs to provide your child with the most appropriate help. The school may bring in other people to decide if your child needs additional support, such as a specialist teacher or (with parent permission), a student support service officer such as a psychologist.

What the school does

Schools encourage parents to tell them about any concerns they might have. Schools help by:

- Assessing reading and spelling abilities from when your child first starts school using the transition statement worked out with your kindergarten
- Regularly reporting and monitoring reading progress
- Providing literacy support for students who have progressed as expected by the end of the first year
- Providing classroom assistance for students with reading difficulties and dyslexia.

When to talk to your child's school

Start talking to your child's teacher as soon as you have concerns about your child's progress. The teacher may also approach you.

Who to talk to first at the school

Start with your child's teacher. A conversation might include:

- Concerns about your child's progress in reading, their attitude towards learning and their self-esteem
- What you and the teacher have noticed and when it was noticed
- What you and the teacher are doing to support the child or young person with the problems, such as focusing teaching on reading difficulties or dyslexia, support in the classroom or supportive home activities.

Your child's teacher can share with you:

- Assessment and overview of your child's learning
- Specific difficulties your child is having and how they are being supported at school
- Your child's strengths
- How you can help at home.

Features of a successful home-school partnership:

- Reading difficulties or dyslexia are identified early
- Students are helped to make out the sounds in oral language, match sounds to letters and learn the meaning of words
- Practical support is provided
- Activities and tasks are provided that allow students with dyslexia to recognise not only what they have difficulty with, but also their strengths – a common strength among dyslexic children is the ability to recognise images and to visualise.

Source:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/learning/Pages/dyslexia.aspx>

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