

HOW TO TELL IF A SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT MAY HAVE DYSLEXIA



Research tells us that approximately 1 student in 20 has dyslexia. This means that there is likely to be at least one student in every class who displays the pattern of strengths and weaknesses characteristic of dyslexia. Do you have a student who puzzles you, displaying well-developed skills and abilities in some areas and unexpected difficulties in others? Complete this checklist to determine if that student could be dyslexic.

BACKGROUND

- family history of literacy learning problems
- seems bright and capable but not making expected progress
- may excel in debating, drama, art, sport, technology, computing, etc.

Compared to their age peers dyslexic students often display difficulties in the following areas:

READING DIFFICULTIES

- is a slow and laboured reader
- dislikes reading aloud
- difficulty decoding unfamiliar words according to alphabetic principles
- relies on a visual 'look and say' approach to reading
- uses the context of the story and flow of language to identify words
- tends to confuse words that look alike (e.g., was/saw, for/from, the/that, unclear/nuclear)
- mis-reads, omits or adds small function words (e.g., the, an, of, this, etc.) and word endings
- misses a line or repeats the same line twice
- misreading which undermines comprehension
- difficulty pinpointing the main idea in a passage
- difficulty using dictionaries, directories, encyclopaedias

SPELLING AND WRITING DIFFICULTIES

- disparity between spoken and written language
- trouble getting thoughts down on paper
- difficulty planning and organising written work
- written work appears disjointed
- difficulty with punctuation and grammar
- frequent spelling mistakes
- phonetic spelling (e.g., *anxiety* - *angsiaty*)
- spells the same word differently in one piece of work (e.g., *more*, *mor*, *moor*)
- confuses similar looking letters (e.g., b/d, m/w)
- produces untidy written work (i.e., lots of cross outs, poorly set out)
- writes slowly and has difficulty completing written work on time
- problems copying notes at speed and taking notes in lessons

MEMORY DIFFICULTIES

- difficulty remembering instructions
- overwhelmed by large volumes of verbal information
- misunderstands complex instructions
- memory difficulties which affect the recall of learned facts in exams
- difficulty learning foreign language vocabulary
- difficulty remembering basic number facts and tables
- trouble doing mental calculations at speed

DIFFICULTY MANAGING ORGANISATIONAL DEMANDS

- difficulty organising life around a timetable
- is often in the wrong place at the wrong time
- forgets which books to bring to class
- difficulty organizing homework and completing assignments on time
- overwhelmed by the amount and complexity of the tasks at this level

SPEECH DIFFICULTIES

Dyslexic children typically have well-developed oral language skills but display specific speech problems, such as:

- word finding problems – has trouble finding the exact words wanted and so uses non-specific words (e.g., thing, stuff, junk, etc.)
- difficulty pronouncing multi-syllable words (e.g., *statistical*, *preliminary*, etc.)

ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

- works more slowly than other students
- has problems working under time pressure, e.g., exams
- is able to do one thing at a time but has trouble with 'multi-tasking'
- obvious good and bad days with no apparent reason

Students with dyslexia may also display the following:

ATTENTION PROBLEMS

- has trouble sustaining attention on schoolwork
- tires easily because of the amount of concentration and effort required to cope

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS

- suffers poor confidence and low self-esteem
- displays frustration
- employs work avoidance tactics

- becomes withdrawn and isolated, sitting at the back and not participating
- acts as the class clown or is disruptive to mask difficulty coping with schoolwork

A student who appears bright and capable and displays many of these difficulties may have dyslexia. If you have concerns about a student who is not progressing as well as expected a good starting point is a comprehensive assessment with an educational psychologist. This will provide information about the student's learning strengths and weaknesses and ascertain whether they have dyslexia. Secondary students formally diagnosed with dyslexia are eligible for special provisions in their coursework and examinations. These students can also benefit from direct teaching to develop their literacy skills to a more functional standard and guidance in managing their studies.