

## DYSLEXIA SYMPTOMS

### **RECOGNIZING DYSLEXIA SYMPTOMS IN A PUPIL OR STUDENT**

A short list of possible clues would include some, but not all, of these:

- A noticeable difference between the pupil's ability and their actual achievement;
- a family history of learning difficulties;
- difficulties with spelling;
- confusion over left and right;
- writing letters or numbers backwards;
- difficulties with math/s;
- difficulties with organizing themselves;
- difficulty following 2- or 3-step instructions.

### POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS IN MORE DETAIL

#### **A discrepancy between the pupil's ability and their actual achievement**

If you notice that a child who appears to be average or bright when they are talking to you is struggling to read, spell or cope with math/s, this may be the strongest clue that something is wrong. It is very common for dyslexic children to be quite able, especially in the areas of creativity (art, drama, drawing, etc) and physical co-ordination (physical education, swimming, sports, model-making, etc.). However, there are differences in the neural links in their brain that makes it hard for them to deal with text (and often with numbers) without extra support. A reading age or grade level of two years below what you would expect from them is a sign of possible dyslexia. Obviously, this could also be caused by other factors such as lengthy absences from school due to illness.

#### **A family history of learning difficulties**

Of the two types of dyslexia, the more common is inherited through the genes and called 'developmental dyslexia'. This has been found to be more common in boys than girls, and is thought to be due to an excess of the male hormone testosterone during pregnancy. If there is a history of learning difficulties among one or more members of the family, it might be significant.

## **Difficulties with spelling**

Spelling is the activity which causes most difficulty for dyslexic children. The observation of spelling errors in short, simple words is the way in which most dyslexic children first come to our attention. Examples of words which cause particular difficulty are: any, many, island, said, they, because, enough, and friend. Other words will sometimes be spelt in the way that you would expect them to be spelt if our spelling system were rational, for example does/dus, please/pleeze, knock/nock, search/serch, journey/jerney, etc.

Dyslexic children also experience difficulties with 'jumbled spellings'. These are spelling attempts in which all the correct letters are present, but are written in the wrong order. Examples include dose/does, freind/friend, siad/said, bule/blue, becuase/because, and woress/worse. 'Jumbled spellings' show that the child is experiencing difficulty with visual memory. Non-dyslexic children and adults often use their visual memory when trying to remember a difficult spelling: they write down two or three possible versions of the word on a spare piece of paper and see which spelling 'looks right'. They are relying on their visual memory to help them, but the visual memory of a dyslexic child may not be adequate for this task. .

## **Confusion over left and right**

A fairly quick way to establish this type of confusion is to ask a child to point to your left foot with his or her right hand. If you try similar instructions - in a non-threatening environment - you will soon be able to see if this causes difficulties or not. (Try it on a colleague - who is not dyslexic - and you can see how a non-dyslexic person is able to sort out the left and right elements quite readily.) You may also notice difficulties with east and west, or in following directions like 'Go to the end of the road and turn left, then right, etc'.

## **Writing letters or numbers backwards**

You will have noticed some children who mix up 'b' and 'd', or even 'p' and the number 9. These letters are the same in their mirror image, and cause regular confusion for a dyslexic person. Some pupils make a point of always writing the letter 'b' as an upper-case or capital 'B', as they find this much easier to remember in terms of the direction it faces.

## **Difficulties with math/s.**

One feature of dyslexia is difficulties with sequencing - getting things in the right order. Math/s depends on sequences of numbers - 2. 4. 6. 8. etc. Whilst many people are aware that dyslexic children and students have problems with reading and spelling, they do not know that math/s can also be a real challenge.

## **Difficulties with organizing themselves**

Whilst you may quite reasonably think that all children live their lives in a mess, this is particularly so for dyslexic children and students, who may have genuine difficulties with planning and thinking ahead to when a book or pen might be needed next. They can really benefit from help with organizing papers and folders under a simple colour-coded system.

## **Difficulty following 2- or 3-step instructions**

'Go to Mrs. Brown and ask her if Peter Smith is in school today. Oh, yes, and ask if I can borrow her dictionary' - such an instruction is just too much! It involves both sequencing and memory skills, and you would be very surprised to see a dyslexic child return with the dictionary and information about Peter Smith! Dyslexic children love to take messages as much as any other child, but it has to be a less complicated instruction, e.g. 'Ask Mrs. Brown if I can borrow her stapler'.

## **IF A CHILD PRESENTS WITH A NUMBER OF THESE SYMPTOMS**

No two dyslexic children are exactly alike, and the above symptoms are just the more common ones. The list is not exhaustive, and few children would show all of these signs. However, if a child is having difficulties with spelling and writing, and has some of these signs, it may be time to think about the possibility of a professional assessment.

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