
Dyslexia in Children

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a developmental difference in learning that affects the ability to learn to read and write fluently. It often runs in families and, without intervention, affected children are at risk of educational underachievement.

Dyslexia primarily impacts reading and writing, but people with dyslexia may also experience memory problems, organisational difficulties, and challenges with information processing — particularly in the language regions of the brain. This can affect learning across the curriculum, including in mathematics and when learning a foreign language. Dyslexia occurs across the full range of intellectual abilities.

Some children with dyslexia avoid reading because it can be both tiring and stressful. Less reading experience can compound their difficulties and make it harder to keep pace with classmates, which in turn can affect self-esteem and confidence.

Every dyslexic child is an individual. Although dyslexia creates challenges, dyslexic children can develop remarkable talents when given time and space to explore ways of learning that work for them.

Signs of dyslexia at primary school age

Not all dyslexic children display the same weaknesses and abilities. Possible indicators include:

- An uneven academic profile — strong in some areas, weaker in others.
- Family members with similar difficulties.
- Slow or problematic development of speech and language.
- Slow speed of processing information.
- Difficulty following instructions.
- Difficulty finding the right word or forming answers to questions; forgetting words altogether.
- Poor motor skills and pencil grip, leading to poor handwriting and messy work.
- Trouble retaining phonetic information — the smaller sounds that make up words.
- Confusion between letters that look or sound similar, particularly b/d, p/g, p/q, n/u, and m/w.
- Slow progress with reading and reading aloud; difficulty blending sounds together.
- Struggle to learn sequences such as days of the week, months of the year, the alphabet, or times tables.
- Difficulty with time concepts — telling the time, keeping to time, understanding yesterday/today/tomorrow.
- Confusion with place value (units, tens, hundreds) and with directional concepts such as up/down, left/right, east/west.

Next steps

If there are concerns that a child may be dyslexic, it is worth discussing them with the child's teacher or SENCO and, if appropriate, applying for a diagnostic assessment carried out by a certified dyslexia assessor. In the meantime, the child can begin to receive appropriate classroom support straight away.

If dyslexia is left untreated, it can lead to:

- Frustration and low self-esteem.
- Anxiety or other co-occurring mental health conditions.
- Withdrawal from friends or social situations.
- Behavioural difficulties.

Potential strengths in dyslexic children

Dyslexic children often bring particular strengths, which can flourish with the right environment and support:

- Creativity and imagination.
- Curiosity and a talent for problem-solving.
- Thinking outside the box and thinking in pictures rather than words.
- Talent in other areas such as sport, art, or music.
- Being highly observant, empathetic, and intuitive.