

Disability Awareness Begins With You



What Is Dyslexia?

The word dyslexia is derived from the Greek "dys" (meaning poor or inadequate) and "lexis" (words or language). Dyslexia is a learning disability characterized by problems in expressive or receptive, oral or written language. Problems may emerge in reading, spelling, writing, speaking, or listening. Dyslexia is not a disease; it has no cure. Dyslexia describes a different kind of mind, often gifted and productive, that learns differently. Dyslexia is not the result of low intelligence. Intelligence is not the problem. An unexpected gap exists between learning aptitude and achievement in school. The problem is not behavioral, psychological, motivational, or social. It is not a problem of vision; people with dyslexia do not "see backward." Dyslexia results from differences in the structure and function of the brain. People with dyslexia are unique, each having individual strengths and weaknesses. Many dyslexics are creative and have unusual talent in areas such as art, athletics, architecture, graphics, electronics, mechanics, drama, music, or engineering. Dyslexics often show special talent in areas that require visual, spatial, and motor integration. Their problems in language processing distinguish them as a group. This means that the dyslexic has problems translating language to thought (as in listening or reading) or thought to language (as in writing or speaking).

What Characteristics Accompany Dyslexia?

Few dyslexics exhibit all the signs of the disorder. Some common signs are:

- Lack of awareness of sounds in words, sound order, rhymes, or sequence of syllables
- Difficulty decoding words - single word identification

- Difficulty encoding words - spelling
- Poor sequencing of numbers, of letters in words, when read or written, e.g.: b-d; sing-sign; left-felt; soiled-solid; 12-21
- Problems with reading comprehension
- Difficulty expressing thoughts in written form
- Delayed spoken language
- Imprecise or incomplete interpretation of language that is heard
- Difficulty in expressing thoughts orally
- Confusion about directions in space or time (right and left, up and down, early and late, yesterday and tomorrow, months and days)
- Confusion about right or left handedness
- Similar problems among relatives
- Difficulty with handwriting
- Difficulty in mathematics - often related to sequencing of steps or directionality or the language of mathematics

Who Has Dyslexia?

The National Institutes of Health estimate that approximately 15% of the U.S. population is affected by learning disabilities. Of students with learning disabilities who receive special education services, 80-85% have their basic deficits in language and reading. Every year, 120,000 additional students are found to have learning disabilities, a diagnosis now shared by 2.4 million U.S. school children. Many children are never properly diagnosed or treated, or "fall through the cracks" because they are not deemed eligible for services. Dyslexia occurs among all groups, regardless of age, race, or income. Many successful people are dyslexic and many dyslexic people are successful. Recent research has established that dyslexia can run in families. A parent, brother, sister, aunt, or grandparent may have had similar learning difficulties.

What Can Be Done?

Individuals with dyslexia need special programs to learn to read, write, and spell. Traditional educational programs are not always effective for individuals with dyslexia.

Program Content: Individuals with dyslexia require a structured language program. Direct instruction in the code of written language (the letter-sound system) is critical. This code must be taught bit by bit, in a sequential, cumulative way. There must be systematic teaching of the rules governing written language. This approach is called structured, or systematic language instruction.

Program Delivery: Individuals with dyslexia require multi-sensory delivery of language content. Instruction that is multi-sensory employs all pathways of learning --at the same time, seeing, hearing, touching, writing, and speaking. Such delivery requires a teacher or therapist who is specifically trained in a program which research has documented to be effective for dyslexic individuals.

The Orton Dyslexia Society can provide referrals for testers, tutors, and schools specializing in dyslexia, as well as information on new technologies, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (I.D.E.A.) legislation, Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations for college students and adults, and medical research updates. We encourage early intervention, including a multi-sensory, structured, sequential approach to language acquisition for individuals with dyslexia. We offer professionals and educators information on multi-sensory structured language approaches to teaching individuals with dyslexia.

For more information, contact The Orton Dyslexia Society at (800) ABCD123 or (410) 296-0232