

## **What Is Dyslexia?**

### **Definition by Exclusion**

Dyslexia is a specific reading disorder that is manifested by difficulty in learning to read that is NOT due to:

- Inadequate intellectual functioning
- Inadequate educational opportunity
- Inadequate social and cultural opportunity
- Visual, hearing, or motor handicap
- Emotional disturbance

### **Definition by Diagnosis**

Dyslexia is a specific reading disorder that is manifested as a subtle language deficiency that has its roots in other areas:

- Phonological coding deficit: inability to represent and access the sound of a word in order to help remember the word
- Phonemic segmentation deficit: inability to break words into component sounds
- Vocabulary development deficit: faculty verbal retrieval processes resulting in difficulty with the rapid, automatic, and sequential processing of verbal information
- Syntactical deficit: difficulty discriminating the syntactical differences among words and sentences

### **General Characteristics of Dyslexia**

A student with specific reading difficulties may:

- Have problems learning letter sounds, particularly the sounds of vowels
- Have difficulty sounding out and blending the component letters and syllables of words
- Read slowly as if seeing each word for the first time
- Try to read too fast making many errors
- Have difficulty remembering common words
- Not effectively use sentence context to identify words
- Tend to guess at a word from the first or first and last letters only
- Reverse letter order when reading
- Substitute a word which is very close in meaning to the word in the text
- Misreads or isn't able to remember function words
- Have difficulty remembering letter order in spelling
- Have difficulty with dictation, primarily holding the whole sentence in memory

## **What to Do If a Student Is Dyslexic**

1. Remove as much pressure as possible.
  - Pressure to hurry
  - Pressure to be more accurate
  - Pressure to do better or make higher grades
2. Remove time limits.
  - Timed intelligence tests should be avoided whenever possible.
  - No task should be timed when literacy skills or symbol interpretation is involved.
3. Give help with assignments.
  - Many dyslexics must have help to work through assignments-a study partner.
4. Use written outlines
  - Create lists with each item numbered to help the dyslexic student keep track of tasks which must be completed.
5. Reduce the quantity of required writing.
  - It is physically impossible because of the differences within the brain for the dyslexic to do large quantities of written work.
  - The student can produce better work when less is required.
6. Use keyboard writing.
  - Tapping keys reduces the labor associated with pencil writing.
  - Self-correcting spelling programs make it easier to get their thoughts down on paper.

## **What NOT to Do If a Student Is Dyslexic**

1. Do not make the student hurry.
  - Anger and hostility are directed toward adults who place such pressure on the student.
  - Life-long emotional damage is done when the child is forced to process more information than the central nervous system is capable of doing.
  - Damages the child's self-esteem and self-confidence.
2. Do not punish the student for inadvertent mistakes.
  - The child has no control over mistakes that occur when the dyslexic brain "shorts out."
3. Do not force the student ahead too rapidly.
  - Dyslexic students need longer to develop basic skills than their classmates who have no learning problems.
  - Giving the dyslexic child ample time to mature should be the norm. Providing "developmental" classrooms where struggling learners would be given extra time to mature is ideal. Dyslexic students are seldom ready for typical fourth grade studies before age ten.

4. Do not load the student down with failure.
  - Students who have difficulty in reading, spelling, math, following instructions, and writing legibly may fail more than they succeed in the mainstream classroom.
5. Life-long damage to the personality and emotional stability of sensitive dyslexic students is the result of being placed in situations where success is impossible.

### **TEA Descriptors of an Instructional Program for Dyslexic Students**

**Individualized:** A reading program in which both materials and methods are matched to each student's individual level, interests, and learning style.

**Multisensory:** An approach that makes a concerted attempt to include more than one mode of presentation of information – visual, auditory, kinesthetic (muscle sense); a “bombardment approach” in which the student is asked to see it, hear it, and feel it simultaneously.

**Intensive Phonics and Synthetic Phonics:** For the most part, two approaches to teaching phonics exist: analytic phonics and synthetic phonics. Analytic phonics takes a student from what they know about letters and their corresponding sounds and asks them to rearrange these letters to make new words. For example, if a student already knows the word “can” by sight, she/he can form new words by adding new initial consonants to the phonogram “an.” A synthetic approach to phonics asks students to learn the sounds of the letters first and then combine or blend these sounds to create words. An intensive approach to phonics would combine both of these approaches.

**Linguistics:** Linguistics is the study of language. Linguists have identified the sound units of language, the meaning units of language and the patterns that occur in language. Linguistic reading materials often utilize phonograms found in the English language as the primary source of words for their texts. For example a linguistic reader might contain such a sentence as “Dan can fan the man.” Recently, some linguists have extended the linguistic approach to include an understanding of language and how it is learned. The “total language approach” has been derived from this belief.

**Meaning Based:** In order for a text to have some meaning for the reader, many factors must be taken into account. Most recent research has shown that prior knowledge of the content included in the text may be the most influential factor in a person's understanding of a text. Written compositions are excellent ways to tap a student's understanding of language, because for the most part, one cannot compose with words one does not understand.

**Systematic, Sequential and Cumulative:** Because reading is a cumulative task, it is important that students build on what they already know. In other words, we do not want to move them into material that they are not ready for simply because they do not have the prerequisite skills. For less skills that allow them to read independently in text with a few unknown words. For mature students it will mean checking comprehension to make certain that further information is not needed before they can understand the text.

**Process Oriented:** Word recognition skills and comprehension skills should not become the end in themselves but rather the means, or processes, needed to become an independent reader.