

How Parents Can Help their Child with Dyslexia

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Whatever the age of your child, pre-school or school-age, there is much that you as a parent can do to help your child with dyslexia to cope with their difficulties. Here are some practical tips that have been shown to work.

Top Tips for the Early Years (Ages 4-6)

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that runs in families. So if any close members of the family have reading and spelling problems, your pre-school child could be at risk. It is possible if not to prevent, then to reduce the effects of dyslexia if you take action early. Here are some tips for parents of pre-schoolers and reception class children.

Read story books to your child every day

This will help with many early skills that are important for reading, like:

- learning about how books work. (e.g. conventions of print like titles, front and back of book, reading from left to right (sit so your child can see the print and pictures while you read))
- teaching children new words for spoken vocabulary
- building up concentration span
- increasing familiarity with printed letters and word shapes
- developing 'listening comprehension' (listening for meaning which is important to later reading comprehension)
- stimulating imagination



Play sound games with words

These help the development of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is the understanding that spoken words are made up of sounds that are joined together. This skill is necessary for learning to decode at school - this is the sounding out of printed words (phonics).

- I Spy
- Yes/No rhyming games, e.g. do these words rhyme or sound the same? 'bat-cat' (yes), do these words rhyme? 'bag-bit' (no)
- Joining sounds together to make words, e.g. what word do these sounds make 'b-i-g'? (big), 's-t-i-ck' (stick); separate the sounds by about a second as you say them
- Taking away sounds from words (this is harder, but most six year olds should be able to do it), e.g. "say the word 'cat', now say 'cat' without the /d sound" ('at'). "Say the word 'meet', now say 'meet' without the /t/ sound" ('me')

Teach and keep practising

letter sounds from an early age

Flashcards are good for single letters, but do also use alphabet books and alphabet friezes on the wall.

Top Tips for Helping Your School Age Child with Dyslexia

Keep reading together

Daily reading, 10 minutes a day, gives your child the opportunity to:

- practise decoding

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- build up a key word reading vocabulary (words like 'was', 'then', 'their')
- increase reading speed and fluency

Practise key word spellings

Learn thoroughly key word spellings which will help to reduce your child's spelling error rate. Use flashcards and practise them regularly.

Direct your child to use context clues

Get round decoding difficulties by teaching context clues to identify words.

Encourage your child to decode an unfamiliar word as far as possible then guide him or her to use context to make a 'best guess'. So in a story about sailing, a word that begins with 'v' and ends with 't' (which he or she should be able to decode) is very likely to be the irregular hard-to-decode word 'yacht'.

Keep the flow going

When your child is reading to you, it's best to correct errors instantly and supply any words your child is struggling to read.

Don't forget reading comprehension

- ask him/her to tell the story back to you
- ask specific questions about the text
- ask 'inference' questions; this means asking for information that is not explicitly stated in the text, such as "how do you think that boy might feel?", "what do you think could happen next?", "can you make up a different ending to the story?"

Top Tips for Keeping on Top of Homework and Studying

Children with dyslexia will need help at home with general aspects of learning too. These include dealing with homework, becoming organised and studying for exams. Here are some tips to encourage your child to develop these skills while avoiding making your home a battleground!

Keep homework under control

- encourage the 'Homework Habit' through always starting soon after returning from school or clubs; have a clear place to work and keep distractions to a minimum
- encourage the preparation and planning of homework; know what needs to be done, how long it should take, when it is due at school, what materials are needed?
- suggest that work is done in short 'chunks' of time using a kitchen timer; work up to 15 minutes for older children before having a short break of a couple of minutes (a longer break can come after an hour of working)
- use an organisation chart; draw up columns with headings like 'date given', 'work due in by', 'work handed in on time', 'teacher's mark or comment' so that you and your child can monitor how the homework is going
- link the organisation chart and the chunks of work time to a systematic reward scheme to reinforce good homework habits; for younger children use stickers and stars, for older children use a points system, and use praise for all.



Beat disorganisation by:

- encouraging routines for bed-time, meal-times, waking up times, as well as for homework
- teaching time-management through routines and also setting aside the right amount of time needed for homework, making sure there is time built in for leisure and enjoyment after
- creating early on the practice of organising papers and books into subjects and files

- ensuring homework and equipment for the next day are packed and ready near the front door before bed-time
- using lists for tasks to be done and ticking them off on completion

- *always* using rewards of some kind to reinforce all the above until they become routine and automatic

Revise and pass exams by:

- listing the topics or syllabus to be examined
- making sure all missed work has been caught up on (check with a teacher *and/or* a reliable other child)
- drawing up a revision chart; tick topics off each time they are revised so there is a visual record for the child of the work he/she has done (it will also be easy to see what still needs to be revised)
- working in small time chunks and changing topics frequently to avoid boredom and inefficient learning
- using memory aides such as post-its with notes/ key words on, made-up rhymes and dictating machines to reinforce what has to be learned
- preparing for exams well in advance and using lots of repetition as both are essential for the child with dyslexia to succeed
- having the whole family do something relaxing the night before - and suggesting an early night too!

Dr Valerie Muter and Dr Helen Likierman are Consultant Clinical Psychologists.

To find out more about your child with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and practical tips for helping at home:

- Visit our website www.psykidz.co.uk
- Read our book for parents of children aged 7-14 years: Muter, V. & Likierman, H. (2008). *Dyslexia: A Parents' Guide to Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Other Learning Difficulties*, London: Vermilion.

For Helping Your Pre-school! Child with Possible Dyslexia:

- Likierman, H. & Muter, V. (2006). *Prepare Your Child for School* .. Vermilion.
- Likierman, H. & Muter, V. (2008). *Top Tips for Starting School*. Vermilion