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Back To School Campaign - Self-esteem August 1999

Many dyslexic individuals suffer from loss of self-esteem. This in turn can lead to behavioural problems at home or in school. It can also prevent them from taking that all-important step towards a successful career and realising their full potential. It is very important to boost your dyslexic child's confidence and self-esteem whenever possible. Consider carefully your child's strengths and weaknesses. Find out all you can about the reasons for any under-achievement and ways of alleviating it.

One of the biggest reasons for low self-esteem is stress.

The dyslexic child may have many strengths; such as a good problem solving ability or an optimistic personality. This does not however overcome the stress of finding that, in spite of all their effort, the child is still not be able to make any sense of the squiggles on the page. This is reinforced by the fact that everyone else in the classroom can understand.

What is the child thinking at this point?

"It must be my fault". Self-blame is a high factor in stress.

An inability to read will affect everything else the child may want to do. Putting together a model from scratch can be very difficult if you cannot read the instructions.

To make all of this even worse, to the child it looks as though it's always going to be like this.

Be aware of the problems, symptoms and signs of stress.

He'll be called 'dumb head' etc. by his peers, 'lazy', 'stupid' by some adults; he'll be late to football or miss it altogether because he hasn't finished his written work, and it takes him ages to change and get his boots on. He'll hate the teacher who asks him to read in front of the class or holds him up to ridicule for the results of a multiplication tables or a spelling test. He will be frustrated by so many things besides school work - not comprehending the time of year in relation to the months, not knowing which day of the week it is, not being able to differentiate between his nearest local towns. He has many disappointments, but he learns to live with them and can be helped to avoid them most of the time - providing you can be one step ahead and realize the risk before it becomes a problem - and do something about it.

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Be aware of stress signs, such as bed-wetting and introversion, which need subtle handling. Aggression and anti-social behaviour have to be checked gently but firmly. Never think all the stress signs are because he is dyslexic - he is growing up too and has all the problems of adolescence. It is a good idea to talk to parents of non-dyslexic children - how are they behaving? It helps to get things into perspective.

Again, be aware that school failure is often more obvious at home. You have to decide when he is twisting you round his little finger and when the problems are overwhelming him. You need to be something of a psychologist. "I'm dyslexic - I can't do it." "Yes, you're dyslexic and it will take you longer; you know that, but you can do it". This is where the good parent/teacher relationship comes into its own. The teacher in whom you have confidence will be able to put your mind at rest or take action appropriately.

Be interested in what your child is doing at school. Praise good work and avoid negative criticism, ego "Well done, you got 15 spellings right!" instead of "you got five spellings wrong".

Are you aware that your child has to work exceedingly hard at school and does get very, very tired? Avoid pressure at home. Even though they forget a lot during school holidays - let them have holidays. Avoid situations of failure at home - he gets enough of those at school. Home must be a safe place, so don't show your anxiety if you can possibly avoid it - it adds to his feeling of inadequacy. Explain carefully to non-dyslexic brothers or sisters, other family members and friends about the difficulties your dyslexic child experiences so that they can help. It is especially important to avoid teasing and to help other children understand if their dyslexic brother or sister appears to get more attention than they do.

Encourage independence.

One way to do this is to give the child some responsibility in the home like looking after the family pet or younger sibling. If you can manage it, holidays/trips away from home without you can help a child gain confidence.

If your child is particularly good at a hobby or skill, encourage them to pursue this. E.g. if they develop an interest in music or an outdoor sport, encourage them to spend time on their hobby. Succeeding at 'out-of-school' activities is important as this will provide a sense of achievement and boost your child's self-esteem.

Boost your child's self-confidence and self-esteem. Even if he appears self-assured, deep down he may be very anxious.

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