

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability. As a medical diagnosis, this term indicates that despite normal intellectual abilities, the dyslexic individual has problems learning to read, write and spell. The presumed cause is neurological, and it is expected that the problems will persist throughout the individual's educational journey.

In planning support for a child with dyslexia, the following four goals should be considered so that strategies can be put into place that work towards achieving these.

1. Continuing to learn to read, write and spell.

Because the literacy skills of a child with dyslexia are below that of his / her peers, the normal classroom curriculum is usually inadequate to help that child learn literacy at their level. There needs to be a specific program. This can include:

- Learning support at school
- Tutorial help outside the school
- Speech Pathology to help learn phonological skills.

In general, the more help the child gets, the better. That is providing the child is cooperative, attentive and not too tired. It needs to be balanced with other activities.

It is important that the expectation is *not* that the child catches up to his / her peers. Because of the dyslexia this may not be possible. The emphasis should be on learning at the child's own rate.



2. Preserving love of literacy

For children with dyslexia, learning to read, write and spell is hard work. Homework is often difficult and traumatic. It is easy for children to develop a dislike, or even a hatred for the written word. If this occurs, they stop learning and their

problem becomes a much larger issue than it needed to be.

Strategies to maintain a child's love of the written word include:

- Reading to the child at night. This is not a learning exercise, it is a time when the child can relax and listen to what the book has to offer. Reading books that peers are reading is particularly useful – the child can then participate in discussions and activities around those books.
- Books on tape (often available from the local library) – these can be listened to at home, or on long car trips.
- Having a home 'culture' of books – going to the library, talking about books, parents reading themselves etc.
- Finding literature the child likes (e.g. magazines on topics of interest)

3. Modifying the classroom curriculum & homework expectations

If a child's literacy skills are below class standard, this impacts broadly on every learning activity. For that child, the experience of learning may become dominated by failure. For this reason, the curriculum expectations need to be modified so that the child can experience success with the same degree of effort that the other children put in. For example:

- In subjects where reading is needed, to make allowances so that their learning or skills are not limited (such as

reading math problems to the child, or allowing additional time).

- Not humiliating the child through activities such as getting them to read in front of the class
- Modifying homework expectations to a fixed amount of time and effort rather than completing the same volume of work as other children.

Modifying the curriculum does not mean making life too easy for the child. It just means reducing the demands so that with a reasonable, sustainable level of effort, that child can experience success and learn at their best rate.



4. Preserving and building the child's self-esteem

For the child with dyslexia, school can be difficult and unrewarding. There is a risk not only that the child will give up but also they may become angry, anxious or depressed. They may think of themselves as stupid in all areas of learning.

- For this reason it is important that children feel good about themselves. The following are useful strategies:
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- Clarifying what the child enjoys and feels successful at, and ensuring that the child spends as much time doing these good things as they do in working on their problem areas.
- Doing activities where other people (peers in particular) are likely to provide the child with positive feedback (e.g. sport). Preserve these activities, and do not take them away as punishments or to make time for more learning.
- Allowing the child to spend time with people who like the child 'just as they are'. This may be, for example, a set of grandparents.
- Helping the child develop an accurate, positive understanding of themselves (this usually begins between 6 and 9 years). Specifically they have to reach understanding and acceptance of the fact that even though they have a dyslexic disorder, they are still smart, likeable, and have a positive future.

Postscript

Many of the most successful people in this world have suffered from dyslexia. You probably know of many examples yourself. These people learned early that they were not stupid, that they had something to offer, that life was difficult, and believed that they could achieve success if they put in the extra effort