

Managing dyslexia

While dyslexia is a lifelong problem, there's a range of specialist educational interventions that can help children with their reading and writing.

These interventions are generally most effective if they're started at a young age. The type and extent of intervention necessary will depend on the severity of your child's difficulties. A specific action plan for your child may be drawn up and implemented by their school.

Most mainstream schools should be able to offer suitable interventions for your child, although a small number of children may benefit from attending a specialist school.

Educational interventions

A number of educational interventions and programmes are available for children with dyslexia.

These can range from regular teaching in small groups with a learning support assistant who delivers work set by teaching staff, to one-to-one lessons with a specialist teacher.

Most interventions focus on "phonological skills", which is the ability to identify and process word sounds. These interventions are often referred to as "phonics".

Phonics interventions can involve teaching a child to:

- recognise and identify sounds in spoken words – for example, helping them recognise that even short words such as "hat" are actually made up of three sounds: "h", "a" and "t"
- combine letters to create words, and over time, to use the words to create more complex sentences
- practise reading words accurately, to help them read more quickly
- monitor their own understanding while they read – for example, by encouraging them to ask questions if they notice gaps in their understanding

These interventions should ideally be delivered in a highly structured way, with development in small steps, and should involve regularly practising what's been learnt. It can also help if your child is taught in a "multisensory" way, where they use several senses at the same time. An example of multisensory teaching is where a child is taught to see the letter "a", say its name and sound, and write it in the air, all at the same time.

How you can help your child

As a parent, you might be unsure about the best way to help your child. You may find the following advice useful:

- **Read to your child** – this will improve their vocabulary and listening skills, and it will also encourage their interest in books.
- **Share reading** – both read some of the book and then discuss what's happening, or what might happen.
- **"Overlearning"** – you may get bored of reading your child's favourite book over and over, but repetition will reinforce their understanding and means they will become familiar with the text.
- **Silent reading** – children also need the chance to read alone to encourage their independence and fluency.
- **Make reading fun** – reading should be a pleasure, not a chore. Use books about subjects your child is interested in, and ensure that reading takes place in a relaxed and comfortable environment.

Parents also play a significant role in improving their child's confidence, so it's important to encourage and support your child as they learn.

Technology for older children

Many older children with dyslexia feel more comfortable working with a computer than an exercise book. This may be because a computer uses a visual environment that better suits their method of learning and working.

Word processing programs can also be useful because they have a spellchecker and an auto-correct facility that can highlight mistakes in your child's writing.

Most web browsers and word processing software also have "text-to-speech" functions, where the computer reads the text as it appears on the screen.

Speech recognition software can also be used to translate what a person is saying into written text. This software can be useful for children with dyslexia because their verbal skills are often better than their writing.

There are also many educational interactive software applications that may provide your child with a more engaging way of learning a subject, rather than simply reading from a textbook.

Adults

Much of the advice and techniques used to help children with dyslexia are also relevant for adults. Making use of technology, such as word processors and electronic organisers, can help with your writing and to organise daily activities.

Using a multi-sensory approach to learning can be helpful. For example, you could use a digital recorder to record a lecture, and then listen to it as you read your notes. It can also be useful to break large tasks and activities down into smaller steps.

If you need to draw up a plan or make notes about a certain topic, you may find it useful to create a 'mind map', rather than writing a list. Mind maps are diagrams that use images and keywords to create a visual representation of a subject or plan.

Adjustments at work

If you're in work, let your employer know that you have dyslexia, as they are required by law to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace to assist you.

Examples of reasonable adjustments may include:

- providing you with assistance technology, such as digital recorders or speech to text software
- giving you instructions verbally, rather than in writing
- allowing you extra time for tasks you find particularly difficult
- providing you with information in formats you find accessible