

How can I tell if someone may be dyslexic?

Dyslexia is often a combination of **abilities** as well as **difficulties**. For more able people, it is often this disparity that is the give-away clue. Despite being creative, artistic, sporting, or very knowledgeable, there will be a cluster of specific difficulties which are individual for each person. Some difficulties are part of normal development, but if they persist they may be indicative of dyslexia.

Dyspraxia (poor planning and co-ordination of motor skills) and *dyscalculia* (difficulty with the concept of number) are other specific learning difficulties, and may be associated with dyslexia, or found on their own.

Someone may have general learning difficulties as well as dyslexia, and their reading and spelling difficulties will not be so unexpected. However, other aspects of dyslexia (such as short term memory problems, directional confusion) should not be overlooked as these may also interfere with learning.

A person's difficulties will change as they get older - a child who copes well at primary school may begin to struggle in secondary school due to the increased demands on their areas of weakness, and also because of new skills which are required such as study skills, note-taking and essay writing. Sometimes it is not until someone reaches university or a change of job that the difficulties become more obviously problematic.

What are some of the possible indicators of dyslexia in young children?

Family/Medical History:

- family history of difficulties with spelling and/or reading
- recurrent ear infections
- difficult/traumatic/early birth
- late to crawl, walk, talk

Speech & Language:

- word mispronunciation e.g. cubumber (cucumber), flutterby (butterfly)
- word-finding problems: difficulty naming friends, teacher, colours
- poor use of syntax, sentence structure
- use of lengthy phrases to say something simple
- having hesitant speech
- taking a long time to learn new words and use them accurately
- difficulty with accurately breaking a word into sounds
- having trouble blending sounds together to form words
- problems with saying 'r' or 'l'
- muddling 'm' and 'n' in speech

Concentration:

- difficulty paying attention and sitting still
- being easily distracted by visual or auditory stimuli

Auditory:

- difficulty learning nursery rhymes
- poor auditory discrimination – cannot distinguish between similar sounds
- problems with repeating a simple rhythm e.g. clapping

Visual:

- enjoying listening to stories but showing no interest in letters or words
- being poor at drawing, but perhaps good at 3D models
- having an ability to draw, but in their own - unusual - style
- difficulty tracking through a drawn maze with pencil
- not being able to do jigsaw puzzles well
- difficulty sorting things by shape
- drawing letters and numbers back to front
- difficulty remembering letters of own name

Memory:

- finding it hard to carry out two or more instructions at one time
- difficulty remembering full name, address, phone number
- problems with counting backwards
- quickly forgetting what has been asked to do
- not remembering names and sounds of letters of alphabet

Motor Skills:

- difficulty with catching, kicking or throwing a ball
- often tripping, bumping into things, or falling over
- finding it hard to hop or skip
- difficulty cutting, sticking or crayoning in comparison with their peer group
- persistent difficulty in dressing, e.g. finds shoelaces and buttons difficult
- inability to use cutlery well
- difficulty with steps or stairs
- being slow to learn ride a bike
- having indeterminate hand preference

Directionality:

- muddling positional words such as on, under, behind, in front, out, in
- putting clothes on the wrong way round or shoes on wrong feet
- difficulty with remembering which way to turn taps or door knobs
- putting cutlery on the wrong side when laying a table
- confusing directions - left/right (or north, south, east and west when older)

Sequencing:

- difficulty learning to sing or recite the alphabet
- inability to remember common sequences: days, months, times tables
- difficulty keeping a simple rhythm
- not being able to easily re-tell a story or event in chronological sequence
- putting clothes on in the wrong order e.g. trousers before underwear
- having problems with words such as 'yesterday', 'tomorrow', 'next week'
- not being able to count as well as would be expected

Other areas:

- problems processing thoughts at speed
- misunderstanding complicated questions or instructions
- finding multi-step processes difficult, although can perform tasks individually
- having obvious 'good' and 'bad' days for no apparent reason
- being disorganised or forgetful, often losing things
- showing a poor concept of time, not being able to judge how long a minute is
- having low self-esteem, lack of confidence, immature or withdrawn behaviour
- difficulty relating to others due to inability to 'read' body language
- becoming excessively tired, due to the concentration and effort required

Possible strengths compared to other skills, in:

- art, creativity or imagination
- interpersonal skills
- appreciation of nature
- mathematical concepts
- understanding and use of words in speech
- understanding of how things work
- dance, sport or music
- lateral thinking, problem-solving skills

For school-age children or adults there may evidence of the following:

Written work:

- poor standard of written work compared with oral ability
- poor handwriting with badly formed letters
- neat handwriting, but writes very slowly indeed
- badly set-out or messily written work, with many crossings out
- spells the same word differently in one piece of work, even one sentence
- difficulty with punctuation and/or grammar
- confusion over upper and lower case letters
- writes a great deal but 'loses the thread'
- writes very little, but to the point
- difficulty taking notes
- difficulty with organisation and structure of written work
- finds tasks difficult to complete on time
- appears to know more than can be committed to paper

Reading:

- hesitant and laboured, especially when reading aloud
- may omit, repeat or add extra words
- reads at a reasonable rate, but has a low level of comprehension
- failure to recognise familiar words
- may mispronounce familiar words
- misses a line or repeats the same line twice
- loses their place - or uses a finger or marker to keep the place
- difficulty in pin-pointing the main idea in a passage
- difficulty with dictionaries, directories, encyclopaedias

Numeracy:

- difficulty remembering tables and/or basic number sets
- finds sequences problematic
- confusion over signs such as \times and $+$, or $+$ and $/$ (divide sign)
- ability to think at a high level, but needs a calculator for simple calculations
- misreads questions that include words
- finds mental arithmetic at speed very difficult
- finds memorising formulae difficult
- confusion about money
- finds questions about time very difficult