

DYSLEXIA AND ASSESSMENTS

SHOULD I GET MY CHILD ASSESSED?

YES! Parents who suspect a problem should take action.

You are your child's best, sometimes only, advocate. If you think that your child may be dyslexic or if they are having difficulties learning to read, it is important to act fast. There is a window of opportunity between the ages of about 4-7 when children pick up these skills more easily and quickly. The window never fully closes but the older the child the more difficult it is to remedy any deficiency such as eliminating the guessing habit and replacing unhelpful strategies.

The key to success with dyslexia or poor literacy skills is **early and appropriate intervention**. This website highlights why early assessment/intervention is essential:

<http://www.balancedreading.com/matthew.html>

The majority of dyslexics are unidentified before school age because unless parents already have a dyslexic child, they may be unaware of the warning signs that may be present at the infant stage. Most children start school enthusiastically, bright, keen and eager to learn but, typically, those who are dyslexic will become deeply unhappy after a year or two, may suffer from frequent 'tummy aches' or other stress symptoms and may become rebellious and disruptive. In addition, the child will probably be struggling to read and write at the level of the majority of the class.

Do **NOT** accept any of the following common excuses for your child's difficulties:

- 'Your child is lazy/ doesn't pay attention /watches too much television',
- 'Boys are often slow learning to read',

- ' Don't worry, s/he will catch up',
- ' S/he's just a bit immature'
- 'S/he's not academic',
- 'It's his/her lack of pre-school education',
- 'It's because English is his/her second language'.

You spend more time with your child than anyone else, and you care more about him than the best-intentioned teacher or psychiatrist. Parents often have a “gut instinct” that something is not quite right and you need to trust this.

Do remember to make sure that your child can see and hear properly though, as poor hearing and/or sight problems could be the cause of, or adding to, the difficulties your child is experiencing. For eye tests, an optometrist or orthoptist with expertise in this particular field is recommended.

Sadly, it is not uncommon for a few teachers to advise against assessments, as “they don’t want to **label** a child as dyslexic”. They do this either as a way to avoid providing appropriate services, or they genuinely lack the necessary knowledge and specialist training to deal with these problems. Whatever the reason, this shows a lack of concern for the child and they are just sentencing a child and their family to years of uncomprehending frustration. Beware of any teacher who uses the words “ dyslexia & label” in a negative, derogatory manner. The best thing you can do is **ignore their advice!** It seems an obvious thing to say, but it is only once you have identified your child’s problems that you can then go about finding the right help. For most people, knowing that there is a reason for their difficulties is like lifting a huge weight of their shoulders.

WHAT DOES AN ASSESSMENT PROVIDE?

A Diagnostic Assessment provides a full profile of the pupil's strengths and weaknesses, indicates if an individual has a specific learning difficulty, such as dyslexia, plus looks at the child's intellectual potential. It provides important information about the child's specific learning needs and suggestions for action. The assessor will give recommendations for both school and home on how best to address your child's needs.

Benefits of an assessment:

- You will know for sure if there really is a problem and what you can do about it.
- You will learn what your child's strengths are and how they best learn.
- Your child will know they are not stupid, but that they have a real reason for their difficulties.
- The school will have practical recommendations on how to help your child learn more effectively.
- It's possible your child may receive extra time in exams. (Known as Access Arrangements)
- Universities offer a great deal of support to dyslexic's such as free computers, extra exam time, use of scribe, and separate room for taking exams to name only a few. Each university offers a huge range of support. They really want each student to reach their maximum potential and will happily assist in any way to achieve this.

Potential problems if you child's dyslexia goes undiagnosed/untreated:

- They may be prevented from mastering the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, resulting in poor academic success and not achieving their potential.
- Low self-esteem, self-confidence and have negative long-term effects.

- Some children may become disruptive/or the class clown to hide their difficulty.
- Stress.
- Interesting to know: Worldwide studies show that 50-60% of prison inmates have reading and writing disabilities.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT AGE FOR AN ASSESSMENT?

There is no magic age when it is appropriate to test for dyslexia, although an assessment can be more detailed where levels of literacy are a factor. As soon as difficulties become apparent, and particularly where a child is becoming distressed or showing behavioural problems, an assessment should be carried out. Leaving a child to fail can be very harmful psychologically. Specialist intervention at a young age is always recommended to enable the child to fully access the curriculum. At a later age, this will be harder to achieve.

A Full educational assessment is available for children 7+ years and this is typically the age that schools and Educational psychologists would recommend for the earliest testing.

Dyslexia Early Screening Test can be used for younger children aged 4.5 to 6.5 years. Screening tests are designed to give an indication of possible dyslexic difficulties. They are **not a diagnosis** and are **not 100% accurate**. Where the test indicates a moderate or high probability of dyslexic difficulties, the best course of action is to follow up with a full diagnostic assessment when age appropriate. If the screening test suggests dyslexic tendencies, then implementing proven dyslexia intervention strategies can only be of benefit to the child, even if they don't yet have the official diagnosis because of their age. As already stated, the earlier the intervention, the better the outcome.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN AN ASSESSMENT?

Before the assessment takes place, both parents and teachers will be given a questionnaire to fill in, which enables the assessor to get a better, holistic view of the child. It is important that parents and teachers work together in identifying and managing children's educational development.

The assessment session varies in length, but on average you can expect to be with the psychologist for between 2 to 3 hours.

During this time, the psychologist tests a range of your child's abilities. For example: phonological awareness, single word reading, reading speed, reading comprehension, single word spelling, writing, problem solving, visual skills and number skills.

The type of things your child will be asked are: to read out a list of words that get harder and harder, they might have to repeat words back to the psychologist, decide if words rhyme and they might also be given sentences to complete.

Some of the words they might have to repeat back are made-up words. This is to test whether they have heard and processed the word correctly rather than relying on their memory to provide the word.

Your child may also be asked to break down words to see if they understand them. For example they are asked to remove the 'g' from goat and then read out the word that is left.

'We give people things that they can do as well as things that they can't,' says Dr John Rack, head of assessment services for the Dyslexia Institute.

'The assessment is to build up a profile of their strengths and weaknesses so we get a balanced picture of what the child really needs.'

The tests are actually quite fun to do. There is no pass or fail and there is no need for your child to be anxious about them.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER AN ASSESSMENT?

Once the assessment has been completed, the psychologist will have a complete profile of your child's strengths and weaknesses.

Usually you will have a talk with the psychologist straight after the assessment where he outlines his findings with you. He will also explain to you how you can help your child and the types of recommendations he will make to the school.

A written report, containing all the results and recommendations, will then be sent to you a couple of weeks later. The report should include information on:

- A summary of background information from home and school.
- Information about the tests used.
- A table of test scores (standardised scores, confidence levels and descriptors).
- A summary of the findings.
- Any entitlement to exam concessions and JCQ access arrangements.
- Recommendations for home and school.

You will then need to give a copy of this report to your school and make an appointment with the SENCO to discuss how the recommendations will be implemented within the school.

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR AN ASSESSMENT

- Tell the child why you are visiting a psychologist, i.e. because the child is having some difficulty with reading, writing, spelling, maths, etc.
- Present it in the most positive way you can – as something you have arranged especially so that you can help.
- Explain what the psychologist will do, i.e. she will talk to the child about school, ask questions, do certain tasks like jigsaws, finding missing parts, do some reading and spelling.
- Explain that this is not an exam. The child cannot fail. The psychologist will only be interested in finding out how the child thinks and learns.
- Tell your child where you are going, at what time and how long it will take.
- Try to ensure that the child is well rested.
- Bring a nutritious snack if necessary.

WHERE CAN I GET MY CHILD ASSESSED?

You will need to do some homework here to find the best option for you and your school. Your first choice is to ask your school what they can provide or recommend.

- Some schools have their own “in-house” Educational Psychologists who can assess your child.

- Some schools invite independent Educational Psychologists to the school 1-2 times a year to assess their students.
- Some schools will only accept an assessment carried out by an Educational Psychologists.
- Other schools are happy to accept an assessment carried out by a Dyslexia Specialist. (Someone who has completed additional specialist training specifically on dyslexia.)
- Some parents go back to the UK for assessments.



DYSLEXIA PARENT
SUPPORT GROUP

EMAIL dyslexia.expat.nl@gmail.com

WEBSITE www.aaof.info/dyslexia.htm