

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is sometimes known as 'Specific Learning Difficulty' [SpLD]



although in the UK this term is used to cover many learning difficulties of which dyslexia is one.

I prefer to use the term "Learning Difference". It highlights that there is a difference in the way that dyslexic learners process information.

Dyslexia is a collection of difficulties and strengths, not all dyslexics experience the same pattern of difficulties.

Dyslexic learners may have difficulties with some of the following:

- **Memory** (difficulty retaining information in short term, working or long term memory e.g. the person forgets what you have just asked him/her to do, especially if you give more than one instruction at a time)
- **Sequencing** (difficulty putting things in order such as days of week, numbers, and letters. May be referred to as visual or auditory sequencing memory)
- **Speed of processing** (slower speed at which information is processed)
- **Auditory perception** (Difficulty in perceiving and discriminating sounds)
- **Visual perception** (visual disturbance - e.g. words seem wobbly, difficulty tracking from one line to the next)
- **Spoken language** (e.g. gets words muddled or jumbled : says 'par cark' for 'car park' , or has difficulty expressing all that is in his/her mind)
- **Word Naming** (difficulty in finding the name for something known e.g.: "I need that 'thingamy' over there.")
- **Motor coordination** may have poor coordination with

- ♦ **Gross** motor movements e.g. catching a ball
- ♦ **Fine** motor movements e.g. using scissors
- ♦ **Grapho** motor movements e.g. handwriting
- **Decoding written language** This can be either a phoneme difficulty or a grapheme difficulty.
 - ♦ A **phonemic** difficulty (sometimes known as phonological processing deficit) is with the **sounds** of letters and words
 - ♦ A **graphemic** difficulty is with the way letters and words **look**.

These difficulties affect a child's learning in:

- Reading
- Writing
- Spelling
- Maths
- Coordination
- Directionality
- Time management

These difficulties are often known as primary difficulties and if dyslexia is not addressed they may trigger some secondary difficulties such as:

- Frustration
- Low self esteem
- Feelings of failure
- A sense of being different
- Anxiety

There are also some positives about dyslexia: Dyslexic people often excel in:

- Creativity
- Lateral thinking
- 3D thinking
- Imagination
- Problem solving
- Making unexpected connections
- Interpersonal skills

The key to unlocking the potential of children with dyslexia is to teach them in a way that they can learn easily: This means teaching dyslexic learners how to become resourceful learners; using their strengths to overcome their weaknesses.



Cartoon from The Dyslexia Pocketbook used with kind permission from Teachers' Pocketbooks
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The most successful way of teaching dyslexic learners is to use multisensory teaching methods, which has proven to be effective across all ages with young children, teenagers and adults. When we use teaching methods that are appropriate to dyslexic learning we can enable the dyslexic learners in our classrooms to flourish.

Dyslexia should not be seen as a block to a successful life. There are some very successful and famous people who are dyslexics such as: Richard Branson, Will Smith, Eddie Izzard, Zoë Wannamaker, Susan Hampshire, Jamie Oliver, to name but a few. For a more detailed list of famous dyslexics see: <http://www.beingdyslexic.co.uk/pages/information/dyslexia-inspiration/famous-dyslexics.php>

References for further reading:

- Dyslexia Pocketbook by Julie Bennett Teachers' Pocketbooks ISBN 9 781903 776681
- Overcoming Dyslexia by Dr Bevé Hornsby Vermillion ISBN 0-09-181320-4

- How to Detect and Manage Dyslexia - A Reference and Resource Manual by Philomena Ott, Heinemann ISBN 0-435-10419-5
- The website for the British Dyslexia Association: www.bdadyslexia.org.uk has many useful information sheets on various aspects of dyslexia

Julie is a freelance dyslexia consultant and trainer and offers in-service training for teachers and teacher's assistants, parents and children. If you would like further help or advice please contact Julie at: Julie@key4u.co.uk

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