

Dyslexia: How to Recognize Dyslexia in Children

by Susan du Plessis Deer momee and dadee I bo not wont to do to shooll eny more because the children ar lafing at me. I canot reed please help me your sun david David is not a dunce. In fact, according to the evaluations of a few professionals, he is rather intelligent. Yet he certainly has a problem, and he shares his problem with millions of other children and adults. David is dyslexic. The term "dyslexia" was introduced in 1884 by the German ophthalmologist, R. Berlin. He coined it from the Greek words "dys" meaning ill or difficult and "lexis" meaning word, and used it to describe a specific disturbance of reading in the absence of pathological conditions in the visual organs. In a later publication, in 1887, Berlin stated that dyslexia, "presuming right handedness," is caused by a left-sided cerebral lesion. He spoke of "word-blindness" and detailed his observations with six patients with brain lesions who had full command over verbal communications but had lost the ability to read. In the century to follow the narrow definition Berlin attached to the term dyslexia would broaden. Today the term dyslexia is frequently used to refer to a "normal" child -- or adult -- who seems much brighter than what his reading and written work suggest. While the term is mostly used to describe a severe reading problem, there has been little agreement in the literature or in practice concerning the definition of severe or the specific distinguishing characteristics that differentiate dyslexia from other reading problems. Instead of getting involved in the wrangling over a definition, one could simply use the "symptoms" below as an indication that a child has a reading problem and therefore needs help.

DIRECTIONAL CONFUSION

Directional confusion may take a number of forms, from being uncertain of which is left and right to being unable to read a map accurately, says Dr. Beve Hornsby in her book "Overcoming Dyslexia." A child should know his left and right by the age of five, and be able to distinguish someone else's by the age of seven. Directional confusion affects other concepts such as up and down, top and bottom, compass directions, keeping one's place when playing games, being able to copy the gym teacher's movements when he is facing you, and so on. As many as eight out of ten severely dyslexic children have directional confusion. The percentage is lower for those with a mild condition, she says. Directional confusion is the reason for reversing of letters, whole words or numbers, or for so-called mirror writing. The following symptoms indicate directional confusion:

- * The dyslexic may reverse letters like 'b' and 'd', or 'p' and 'q', either when reading or writing.
- * He may invert letters, reading or writing 'n' as 'u', or 'm' as 'w'.
- * He may read or write words like 'no' for 'on', or 'rat' for 'tar'.
- * He may read or write 17 for 71.
- * He may mirror write letters, numbers and words.

SEQUENCING DIFFICULTIES

Many dyslexics have trouble with sequencing, i.e. perceiving something in sequence and also remembering the sequence. Naturally this will affect their ability to read and spell correctly. After all, every word consists of letters in a specific sequence. In order to read one has to perceive the letters in sequence, and also remember what word is represented by the sequence of letters in question. By simply changing the sequence of the letters in 'name', it can become 'mean' or 'amen'. The following are a few of the dyslexia symptoms that indicate sequencing difficulties:

- * When reading, the dyslexic may put letters in the wrong order, reading 'felt' as 'left', or 'act' as 'cat'.
- * He may put words in the wrong order, reading 'are there' for 'there are'.
- * He may omit letters, i.e. reading or writing 'cat' for 'cart', or 'wet' for 'went'.

Dyslexics may also have trouble remembering the order of the alphabet, strings of numbers, for example telephone numbers, the months of a year, the seasons, and events in the day. Younger children may also find it hard to remember the days of the week. Some are unable to repeat longer words orally without getting the syllables in the wrong order, for example words like 'preliminary' and 'statistical'.

DIFFICULTIES WITH THE LITTLE WORDS

A frequent comment made by parents of children struggling with their reading is, "He is so careless, he gets the big difficult words, but keeps making silly mistakes on all the little ones." Certainly, the poor reader gets stuck on difficult words, but many do seem to make things worse by making mistakes on simple words they should be able to manage -- like 'if', 'to', 'and'. It is important to note that this is extremely common, and not a sign that a child is particularly careless or lazy.

LATE TALKING

Research has revealed a dramatic link between the abnormal development of spoken language and learning disabilities such as dyslexia. The following are just a few examples:

- * A study in 1970 of Doctor Renate Valtin of Germany, based on one hundred pairs of dyslexic and normal children, found indications of backwardness in speech development and a greater frequency of speech disturbances among dyslexics than among normal children.
- * According to Doctor Beve Hornsby, author of "Overcoming Dyslexia," about 60 percent of dyslexics were late talkers.
- * In her book "Learning Disabilities," author Janet Lerner states, "language problems of one form or another are the underlying basis for many learning disabilities. Oral language disorders include poor phonological awareness, delayed speech, disorders of grammar or syntax, deficiencies in vocabulary acquisition, and poor understanding of oral language."

In most cases, a baby should be able to understand simple words and commands from the age of nine months. From around a year he should be saying his first words. By two he should have a vocabulary of up to 200 words, and be using simple two-word phrases such as "drink milk." By three he should have a vocabulary of up to 900 words and be using full sentences with no words omitted. He may still mix up his consonants but his speech should be comprehensible to strangers. By four, he should be fully able to talk, although he may still make grammatical errors. If a child talks immaturely, or still makes unexpected grammatical errors in his speech when he is five years old, this should alert the parents to probable later reading problems. The parents should immediately take steps to improve the child's language.

DIFFICULTIES WITH HANDWRITING

Some dyslexics suffer from poor handwriting skills. The word "dysgraphia" is often used to describe a difficulty in this area, and is characterized by the following symptoms:

- * Generally illegible writing.
- * Letter inconsistencies.
- * Mixture of upper/lower case letters or print/cursive letters.
- * Irregular letter sizes and shapes.
- * Unfinished letters.
- * Struggle to use writing as a communicative tool.

OTHER DYSLEXIA SYMPTOMS

- * Makes up a story, based on the illustrations, which bears no relation to the text.
- * Reads very slowly and hesitantly.
- * Loses orientation on a line or page while reading, missing lines

or reading previously-read lines again. * Tries to sound the letters of the word, but is then unable to say the correct word. For example, sounds the letters 'c-a-t' but then says 'cold'. * Reads with poor comprehension. * Remembers little of what he reads. * Spells words as they sound, for example 'rite' for 'right'. * Ignores punctuation. He may omit full stops or commas and fail to see the need for capital letters. * Poor at copying from the board.

About the Author

Susan du Plessis has been involved in helping children reach their full potential for 18 years. She holds BD and BA Hons (psychology). For more information on dyslexia visit [Dyslexia Online](http://www.audiblox2000.com/dyslexia_dyslexic/dyslexia.htm) *** This article can be freely used as long as a link to "Dyslexia Online" (http://www.audiblox2000.com/dyslexia_dyslexic/dyslexia.htm) is provided.

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