



Hidden in Plain Sight: Seven Signs of Dyslexia

A Parents' Guide

Recognizing signs. Seeking support. Helping children thrive.

Dyslexia at a Glance

One of parents' most gratifying experiences is seeing their child succeed. Sometimes, however, parents may find their intelligent, hardworking child is struggling with reading.

While learning to read is difficult for many children, when these problems are severe or persistent, parents should be aware that their child could be dyslexic.

Dyslexia is more than just having trouble recognizing letters. It's a complex neurological language difference defined by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA, 2002) as

A language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing and pronouncing words.

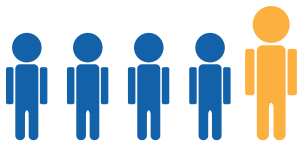
Compounding the problem is the fact that dyslexia is a disability that too often goes undetected.

An Undetected Educational and Emotional Roadblock

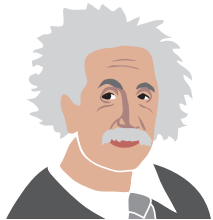
One in five American schoolchildren has dyslexia — and it runs in families. If you have a family history of learning struggles, you should share this fact with your child's teacher.

Since dyslexia stems from neurological differences, it often goes undetected. For example, in the classroom children sometimes act out during reading time, and teachers attribute it to attention issues or laziness. In fact, these students may be working hard to cover up their dyslexia because they don't know how to ask for help — or even if they should.

Dyslexia can also go undetected if a child is smart enough to find ways to compensate and hide his reading deficit. He may mask it using his intelligence, creativity and verbal skills. The unfortunate result is that while he may do "well enough," he may never reach his full potential.



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Did you know that in addition to having a 160 IQ, Einstein had dyslexia?

Dyslexia is not related to intelligence.

The Cost of Dyslexia

There are costs when dyslexia goes unidentified. Children who do not get the help they need struggle with school and have higher dropout rates, reducing the potential benefit and impact they could have on society.

Dyslexia also inflicts psychological costs. When not properly understood as a true learning difference that requires acknowledgment and accommodations, dyslexia can lead to feelings of inadequacy and shame in a child.

There is nothing shameful about having dyslexia. The neurological differences that make it hard to read also provide certain advantages. Dyslexics excel in big-picture thinking, creativity, spatial relationships and design. There are countless ways that dyslexics can make a huge positive impact on society if their reading is not allowed to hold them back.

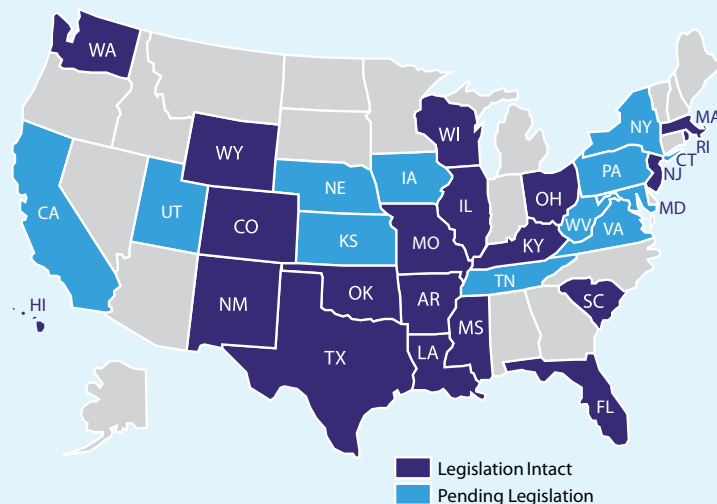
Early identification helps children receive the assistance and resources they need so they can flourish in those critical developmental years — and helps parents and teachers tap into support systems they need, as well.

National and Local Legislation

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) requires that schools provide special education services to students whose learning disabilities adversely impact their educational performance. In addition, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act ensures that students with learning disabilities receive the accommodations they need in school.

More than 20 states (Youman & Mather, 2013) have passed laws specifically addressing dyslexia support, and national and local parent groups work tirelessly to bring about new legislation each year.

More States Are Adopting Dyslexia Legislation



As of 3-1-14

How early can you identify the warning signs?

The National Institutes of Health report that dyslexia is identifiable with 92% accuracy by the age of six. Review age-appropriate potential indicators for dyslexia and ask your child's teacher if she recognizes any of the signs that are often hiding in plain sight.

Do you recognize any of these signs?

If so, your next step should be to speak with your child's teacher to request a formal screening. If found to be at risk or identified with dyslexia (or another learning disability), you, together with the school's intervention team, can plan a course of action to help your child find success in the classroom and in life.

Seven Common Signs of Dyslexia

1. She has trouble rhyming

Research suggests that difficulty with speech sounds is one of the main characteristics of dyslexia. For a dyslexic child, rhyming or working with syllables is tough because they do not detect the component sounds in words, known as phonemes. This lack of "phonemic awareness" is a common symptom of all dyslexics, and teaching it is critical for their success in reading. A dyslexic child may find it hard to manipulate the sounds in words even though she knows the meaning. For example, she may say "pacific" instead of "specific."

2. He doesn't recognize words accurately

The process of sounding out a written word is called decoding, and decoding problems are a key sign of dyslexia. A child may compensate by using context or picture clues to guess at words. For example, if the story shows a house, he may replace the word "house" for "home" when reading.

3. She transposes letters and has difficulty decoding words

Another common sign of dyslexia is letter transposition, such as substituting "b" or "d" with "p." Take special note if this occurs past the first or second grade.

4. He's a poor speller

Dyslexics often rely heavily on phonetic spelling, such as "complumnt" for "compliment." Other signs include omitting or adding letters and spelling the same word in different ways in the same writing sample.

5. She struggles when reading aloud

If a child is having a hard time sounding out words, not recognizing common sight words like "the" or "why" or is skipping small words, this is a sign of decoding problems.

6. He acts out at homework time

To avoid reading and the effort and embarrassment that can accompany it, dyslexic children often have trouble doing homework. They may become easily distracted, refuse to work, or make excuses, making homework take far longer than it should.

7. She's really bright in other areas, compared to her reading level

Dyslexia is not linked to intelligence. It is an issue related to reading only, which is why it is common to see dyslexics excel in other subjects.

Take Action

Tools and Tips for Getting Help

If you suspect or have confirmed that your child is dyslexic, it's important to develop a plan for collaborating with her school. Discuss strategies that address your child's specific needs and access the appropriate resources and supports. With reading interventions and accommodations, she will begin to regain confidence as a learner.



A Framework for Success That Helps Your Child Thrive

READING PROGRAMS

Dyslexics can learn to read, but they require special instruction that addresses their specific challenges. To be successful readers, they must use reading programs that are visual, auditory and kinesthetic (i.e., programs that are multisensory) and that involve a high degree of repetition to address their challenges with decoding the written word. Such programs are critical and need to come from a specialist. Look for help either through your school's special education department or through private reading specialists trained in multisensory structured language (MSL) instruction.

AUDIOBOOKS

Audiobooks are a proven complement to multisensory reading programs, and the two combined enable a child with dyslexia to stay on track with her studies. When reading is a challenge, audiobooks allow children to learn important information they need. Success in reading will boost self-confidence, which in turn fosters achievement and motivation.

Look for organizations that provide audiobooks for just this purpose. Adding them to your child's program of supports will help her get up to speed — and keep up with the content her peers are learning.

*Learning Ally audiobooks
make me feel like a normal
kid. I can read all the same
books as my friends.*

—SKYE MALIK, 16, STUDENT



Success in reading boosts self-confidence, which in turn fosters achievement.

Audiobooks Help Your Child ...

Become a better reader by supporting the development of word identification, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension skills

Become a better learner by offering access to grade-level and high-interest content while basic reading skills are being remediated

Increase self-esteem and confidence by allowing your child to independently access text and keep up with peers

Feel a natural love of stories by letting him or her listen to the ones that are interesting, inspiring and fun

CHAMPIONS

Champions are an essential component of the framework for success. They see things children can't, and they can advocate for children at critical decision points (e.g. asking for accommodations, arranging a reading program). Champions can be parents, teachers, even tutors. They can help coordinate assessments provided either through your school or private specialists that will identify a child's areas of strength and weakness. Post-assessment, a champion will help a child get his bearings, talk about his experience and get the accommodations he needs to succeed. She can help him learn to self-advocate and do the work it takes to build confidence and a positive outlook.

Next Steps

Early Action Makes All the Difference

Experts say that a child's brain is most adaptable at younger ages, which is why detecting, identifying and responding to dyslexia early is key. Learning Ally can help.

A national nonprofit since 1948, Learning Ally provides audiobooks and parent support services that empower families to help dyslexic learners thrive:

- »» Peer support and advice as well as consultations with trained parent support through specialists
- »» Reading program recommendations and referrals to our network of specialists and tutors
- »» A library of over 75,000 audiobooks, created to help children love stories and reading, inspire learning and build confidence
- »» Extensive online resources, exclusive webinars and tools that suggest the best mix of accommodations and aids that will work for a child
- »» Tips and strategies that help you advocate for your child, celebrate her strengths and help her build confidence

Use the information in this guide to begin a conversation with your child's school and foster a positive collaboration with her teacher. Together, explore options and find ways to help your child thrive.

My parent support specialist was an angel — she gave me hope and is one of the first people I talked to about my son's learning disability and educational needs. I left the call feeling very uplifted and confident in my son's future.
—LEARNING ALLY PARENT

 twitter.com/Learning_Ally

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If you think your child might have dyslexia,
take the next step: Learning Ally's dyslexia screener.
LearningAlly.org/dyslexia-screener

To download additional copies of this white paper, visit
LearningAlly.org/ParentWhitePaper

To download a version of this white paper created for educators, visit
LearningAlly.org/educators/hiddeninplainsight/
Feel free to give a copy to your child's teacher.

References

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, 20 USC Sec 1412 and 20 and USC Sec 1474 et seq. (2004)

International Dyslexia Association. (2002). Baltimore, MD.

Youman, M., & Mather, N. (2013). Dyslexia Laws in the USA. [Abstract]. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 63(2), pp. 133-153.