

Explaining dyslexia to children

Every child is different and dyslexia will affect them in different ways. Understanding dyslexia can be confusing for adults as well as children so it is important to talk about it, even if you don't know all the answers.

Tell your child that they learn in a different way and so it will help them to be taught in different ways. Explain that dyslexia does not mean that your child is 'stupid'. Dyslexia has nothing to do with intelligence.

Children can feel different emotions when they are told that they have dyslexia. Some see it as a good thing because it explains why they have been having difficulties. They may be relieved and glad that they are not 'stupid'. Others might feel that they are 'different' from their classmates or even ashamed.

Lots of people have dyslexia – 1 in 10 people – and it can be quite mild or quite severe. There are lots of things that can help children with dyslexia do well in education, enjoy their hobbies and get a good job. Dyslexia should not hold anyone back from doing whatever they want to do.

There can be positive things about dyslexia which might include:

- strong visualisation skills (good for art, science, crafts, engineering)
- strong problem-solving skills
- strong interpersonal skills.

Things that can be hard for children with dyslexia:

- poor memory, organisation and sequencing problems (putting things in order or following patterns)
- difficulties with reading, writing and sometimes maths
- being organised
- extra effort is needed to do some things which is very tiring.

However, it is important to stress that there are ways round these things. Try these steps:

- talk about dyslexia in a positive way
- say you don't know all the answers because everyone is different but that you will find out together
- find information from places like the internet, books, other people, Dyslexia Scotland's website, Helpline and publications
- ask your child what they find easy as well as what is difficult
- look at each task and work out with your child why something is easy or hard
- talk about other things as well because they are also important to your child
- make sure the school has all the information they need about your child. Help your child to write or speak about what dyslexia means to them and what helps.

This will help classmates as well as teachers understand and help keep a positive 'can do' attitude.

- include brothers, sisters and other family members so they understand the positives and negatives and can help.

Here are some things parents have said to us:

'I did not want to gloss over the fact that having dyslexia is challenging when it comes to school work but I also wanted to focus on what she could do well, how her thinking was different and how she could use her strengths to get where she wants to be. She said it helped her because she stopped seeing her problems as hurdles to struggle over but more of an interesting set of gates to open.'

'When talking about dyslexia with my son I talked a lot about him being intelligent as he thought he wasn't and was feeling so bad about himself and calling himself stupid all the time.'

'My daughter gets frustrated when people say 'learning difficulty'. It really should be a learning difference – she says nothing is difficult if you teach it to her in her learning style.'

Books and resources that can help:

So, you think you've got problems? by Rosalind Birkett

Dyslexia - Talking it Through by Althea

Brian has dyslexia by Jenny Leigh

My Little Brother by Chieko Tateno

Dyslexia: A Teenager's Guide by Dr Sylvia Moody

The Teenage Guide to Stress by Nicola Morgan

Dyslexia: A Parent's Survival Guide by Christine Ostler

CBBC Newsround 'My Dyslexic Mind' – a special programme about dyslexia

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/20783005>

All of Dyslexia Scotland's leaflets can be downloaded free from our website at www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk. Leaflets which might be of particular interest are:

- Famous People with Dyslexia
- Information for Parents
- Helping with reading, spelling, maths