

How To Get A Diagnosis



*How to test and
get an accurate
diagnosis for your
struggling child*

by Liz Dunoon



dyslexia**daily**.com *where life meets dyslexia*

Disclaimer

All the information, techniques, skills and concepts contained within this publication are of the nature of general comment only and are not in any way recommended as individual advice. The intent is to offer a variety of information to provide a wider range of choices now and in the future, recognising that we all have widely diverse circumstances and viewpoints. Should any reader choose to make use of the information contained herein, this is their decision, and the contributors (and their companies), authors and publishers do not assume any responsibilities whatsoever under any condition or circumstances. It is recommended that the reader obtain their own independent advice.

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The Importance Of Getting An Accurate Diagnosis

The one endorsement in this book to spend any money is right here. You must have your child's learning disability diagnosed accurately; it is as simple as that. Accurate, age appropriate testing can be conducted from as early as 6 or 7 years of age and, according to The International Dyslexia Association, even earlier.

Don't be put off testing early. The decision to do so may wipe out years of being misunderstood and struggling to learn.

Dyslexia is complex and can range from extremely severe to relatively mild. You need to know the exact nature of your child's condition in order to help them. Just because a parent or grandparent has dyslexia or has learning difficulties does not mean your child with dyslexia will be affected in the same way. Never assume family members will be the same. In a world full of different learning

challenges, you need to know exactly what is influencing your child's ability to learn or to struggle with learning. Your child's strengths will also be uncovered in more detail, which is often the key to helping your child succeed.

Every state of every English speaking country in the world has a different set of legal standards for dyslexic students. It pays to be aware of your legal rights. Dyslexia assessments are a legal right for a child with 'special education needs' in the UK and children with 'specific learning disabilities' in the USA. In the UK and USA, parental involvement in the assessment process is also ensured by legislation.

In the UK, the 1981 Education Act allows parents to request a free assessment for their child if they have a 'special educational need' - that is significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children their age.

In the USA, a free evaluation prior to the creation of an educational plan is one of the key provisions of Public Law 94-142.

If you are considering a private school, it is worthwhile discussing their individual policy and level of support for students with dyslexia.

In other states and countries the law is not so definitive. Dyslexia assessments can still be obtained, but this is not a legal right.

Why Parents Must Be The Driving Force

“There is no doubt about it - the fastest way to get your child tested is to pay for it and get a private assessment. If you have the money, I would strongly recommend that you do this and the sooner the better. The earlier the assessment the better the outcome for your child will be.”

Remember though, it is never too late to have an older child or adult assessed. The tests

used provide an incredible amount of useful information. They can be life changing.

In a perfect world where money is no object, I am sure that we would all act quickly and go private. Why is it so hard to get my child tested, I hear you ask? Why does it take so long and have to be so expensive? These are very good questions. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a magic wand to make getting tested for dyslexia and other learning disabilities easily accessible and free for everyone? Imagine a day when this type of testing can be conducted in a child's first year of school for free as part of the learning program. Then as parents we could begin to assist and support our child from day one and teachers could teach to suit our child's learning style.

Unfortunately this is not the case, not yet anyway. The fact is that parents often have to prove that their child is struggling and has

fallen a long way behind their classmates before they can get a free assessment provided by the government. To add to this, the waiting times can be long and frustrating. The same can apply for teachers who know that a student is struggling and, with or without the parent's consent, is seeking a diagnosis on their student's behalf.

It is important to realise however, that as a parent or guardian you must often be the driver when it comes to seeking help for your struggling child. This is not to say that there aren't some excellent caring teachers in our schools. There are many, however there are also many students to teach and many demands are made on a dedicated teacher's time in the current education system. So it often comes back to the parents to represent their children and seek action on their behalf.

Why You Need To Know If Your Child Has A Learning Disability Or Not

It seems to be a general worldwide trend that there is a reluctance to label children with a specific learning disability and most parents will have their own view on this. The outcome of this reluctance to label is this: without some form of diagnosis and recognised label, your child may never receive the level of assistance they are entitled to from the relevant education authority. Regardless of the extent of their dyslexia or learning disability, wouldn't you want them to receive as much assistance as is available to them while they are at school?

“Childhood, youth and formal education is such a short phase of a person’s long life. However we all know that what happens during these years can determine the adult they will become, the attitudes, skills and confidence they will develop and the future they can look forward to.”

Ultimately it is a parent's choice whether their child will be tested or not and whether you want a label to be applied or not. Just don't waste the opportunity to help your child as early as you can. It is the one time when being a pushy parent can be a major positive and it can be critical when it means the difference between your child being given extra assistance or not.

Even if you don't have a definite diagnosis or label, or you have to wait to see a specialist, your child can receive extra assistance from teachers, educational specialists and parents if they are struggling to learn and are not reaching educational benchmarks. There is also no reason why you can't begin to offer your child some assistance at home.

Please remember that many experts define dyslexia as a complex brain-processing problem which needs to be diagnosed accurately by specialists with the appropriate qualifications. When your child is at school in

their classroom, most teachers see only their behaviour and the schoolwork they produce. This can illustrate the symptoms of certain brain processing problems, but it is not and never will be an accurate way to diagnose dyslexia.

Who Is Qualified To Test Your Child For Dyslexia?

- ✓ An in-school learning support teacher or counsellor with the appropriate postgraduate qualifications. You need to check qualifications thoroughly. If you require further clarification, check with the dyslexic association in your state of territory.
- ✓ A developmental paediatrician, although you may need a referral from your family doctor.
- ✓ A developmental child psychologist.
- ✓ An educational neuropsychologist.

- ✓ An educational psychologist, who may be allocated to assist you through your Government Education Department.
- ✓ A children's hospital will often have a department specifically for children with development or specific learning disabilities, where all the appropriate specialists are available. This could include paediatricians, psychologists, social workers, speech therapists, physiotherapists, nurses, teachers and others. These departments often have close links with education authorities. This means you may not need further testing and will receive a comprehensive report covering all aspects of your child's learning disability, support services and what you can do to support them effectively.
- ✓ A private clinic that specialises in the diagnosis of children's developmental and learning disabilities, specifically dyslexia.

How To Choose The Right Dyslexia Assessor

Now this is important. Just because a person is qualified to test for a specific learning disability such as dyslexia, it does not automatically make them the best person to assess your particular child. If you have the ability to choose, the importance of finding the right person can be critical for your child, so you need to conduct some research. Not only do they need to have the right qualifications so you get exactly what you need in the way of an accurate diagnosis, they must also have the right personality to suit you and your child.

If you just don't have this option and are referred to a specialist within your education system, you can still be well informed as to what form the assessment will take, who will conduct it and what you will get out of it.

The individual or team who assesses your child must have a proven track record in assessing and diagnosing learning disabilities. They must have a knowledge and background in psychology, reading, language and education. They must be aware of the latest research, educational and medical advances in the area of dyslexia. They must also have knowledge of how individuals learn to read and an understanding of what it is that causes people to struggle to learn. They must know how to measure learning and language difficulties and your child's general intelligence, in order to make an accurate diagnosis and recommendation.

Conducting Research To Locate A Good Dyslexia Assessor

You can get started by speaking to others about what you are seeking. Talk to other parents, teachers, learning support teachers, school principals, family members and friends. You can even get in contact with other

schools if yours is not being helpful. Learning difficulties are so common that it is not hard to find people who can point you in the right direction.

“In this field of work it is possible to find the most incredible and dedicated professionals with an intricate knowledge of a range of learning disabilities and an amazing understanding of how it feels to be dyslexic. These individuals are often not in the job of assessing and diagnosing learning disabilities for the money, but for the rewarding opportunity to change people’s lives for the better.”

These people do exist and if you can find an individual like this, you and your child are indeed blessed.

Next, you need to understand and decide what it is you want to get out of your child's

assessment. Money and time are also a big issue for most parents, so if you have the resources to go private, you need to be sure that any money you spend or time that you take off work gives you exactly what you are seeking.

Remember you can shop around. You are a customer and you want the best professional and the best result for the time money and effort you are putting in. Prices will vary and so will the personality of the specialist, the time they allocate to you, their effort and the test results you receive.

So how do you shop around? Where do you look? You can jump on the internet. Type *dyslexia testing* into the search engine, as well as the area or state in which you live. See what comes up and then make some phone calls, speak to people and get them to send you some information. You may also be able to access contact details through your local school, or ring or email your local Education

Department office for a list of recommended specialists. Check the telephone directory and don't forget to check out this book's resource directory at www.dyslexiadaily.com. There is a good chance you will find what you are seeking there.

The Dyslexia Assessment

Having a formal diagnosis of your child's learning disability is a must if you want to ensure your child has access to all the educational considerations that are available to them. As parents this is an important part of ensuring your child is provided with the best possible opportunity to succeed within the school system. Beware of people working within the school system who deter you from seeking a formal diagnosis. They are often not qualified to do so and if your child does not have a formal diagnosis then it just so happens that your child's learning disability does not have to be catered for in its entirety by the school your child attends. You can

liken the assessment to having a legal document which states the exact nature of your child's condition and their rights. Now you might be beginning to understand why only highly qualified individuals with legitimate qualifications are able to assess children for dyslexia. The range of tests used must also be recognised and endorsed by the Education Department within your state. All these factors invariably add up financially, meaning the cost of having your child assessed is higher than you might expect.

A formal diagnostic assessment report is based on a battery of tests. Depending on the assessor, these could be administered over the course of one day or over a series of days. Different assessors use a range of different tests, but your evaluation should include:

- A case history that includes information on family history, development, medical history, behaviour and academic background
- A measure of intellectual functioning – also known as an intelligence test
- Tests of specific oral language skills related to reading, writing ability and a phonological test
- Educational tests to determine levels of functioning and ability in the basic skill areas of reading, spelling, written language and math. Testing in reading and writing should include the following measures:
 - Single word decoding of real and nonsense words
 - Oral and silent reading in context
 - Reading comprehension

- Spelling in isolation and in text
 - Sentence, story and essay writing
 - Handwriting
- A classroom observation, and a review of any remediation programs used to date
- Many assessors will also recognise the need to explore the potential of visual dyslexia - that is where distortions of text and text movement can be occurring.

How Do I Explain The Dyslexic Assessment To My Child?

Children who struggle at school often find the idea of assessments uncomfortable. They may feel that these tests are going to prove once and for all that they are completely stupid and everyone is going to know about it. You need to allay these fears. It's all about the way you explain what is going to happen. Here are some ideas to help you:

- ✓ 'There are no right or wrong answers to these tests – you can't fail'
- ✓ 'The results of the tests are confidential, the children at school don't even need to know about them'
- ✓ 'These tests are specially designed - they will give us some answers as to why you find some tasks at school so difficult'
- ✓ 'These tests will help us to clarify how you like to learn'
- ✓ 'These tests will help the teachers at school to understand how best to teach you and what style of activities you prefer when learning'
- ✓ 'These tests will tell us your strengths as well as your weaknesses so we will know what we need to do to help you through school'
- ✓ 'Often children who struggle at school do so for very real reasons. Sometimes it's because they learn differently – if the

tests show that this is the case for you, the school will give you more help'

- ✓ 'We know you are clever even though you struggle at school. These tests will tell us how clever you are for your age'
- ✓ 'The person who will be assessing you is independent of the school system. It is their job to make your life easier, not more difficult'
- ✓ 'It won't be all reading and writing; you will get to do lots of different activities'
- ✓ 'Let's face it, it's a day off school and I will take you and bring you home'

Who Should Attend The Meeting After The Dyslexia Assessment To Receive The Results?

It is a must for all active parents and carers of the child who is experiencing learning difficulties to attend the appointment where the results are given and strategies to assist

are discussed. That could be Mum and/or Dad, a close family friend, a grandparent, extended family or direct carers such as foster parents.

This cannot be stressed enough. Often this task is left to just one parent or family member, as not everyone else sees the need to take time off work and be present. There is no doubt that the more active parents or carers that have this first-hand information, the more effective your team-like assistance to your child will be. I implore you to invest one day in the life of your child to ensure you are all on the same support team from day one. This is not something you should compromise on. Another parent or carer, through a sheer lack of knowledge and understanding, can undo all the hard work of an educated parent very easily and unwittingly. Don't allow this to happen to your child.

What You Should Receive After Your Child's Dyslexia Assessment

It doesn't matter whether the assessment is done through the Education Department or privately; you need to ensure you receive the following:

- ✓ A thorough understanding of your child's learning strengths and weaknesses in plain simple language that you can understand. You need to receive a copy of the actual report, as well as a clear verbal explanation of the results to ensure your understanding. Make sure you read the other relevant eBooks on Dyslexia Daily before you go, so that you will understand dyslexia in all its forms. This will ensure you ask all the right questions of the specialists and understand the complicated jargon.
- ✓ An assessment result of your child's general level of intelligence

- ✓ A detailed set of test results and related documents which will define your child's processing difficulties in intricate detail.
- ✓ The same test results should determine your child's ability to access special education services available in schools in your particular state or territory. These results and the diagnosis can also determine your child's ongoing eligibility for special considerations and programs in secondary schools, colleges and universities.
- ✓ A suggested list of teaching methods that can be applied to your child in school and at home.
- ✓ Any referrals to specialists that your child may require.
- ✓ A detailed list of resources including books, websites and teaching aids which may benefit your child.

Watch Out For Information Overload

A note of warning here, you only need to be made aware of those resources that can help your child specifically. There are literally thousands of resources available for children with learning disabilities. I'm sure many of you have already been on the internet and have come away gobsmacked and confused by all that is available.

At the meeting after your assessment to receive your child's results it can become a confusing and extremely expensive minefield and you may be making buying decisions based on emotion rather than clear thinking.

Beware Of Sales People

Unfortunately, there are some people who seek to make large amounts of money from your fragile emotional state and your child's learning disability. Consider carefully what your child can cope with or really

needs. Children with dyslexia are often mentally exhausted after a day at school. When you are considering the purchase of a resource or learning program, make sure you see a direct connection between what is being offered and how it will help your child specifically. If you can't see a connection I recommend that you don't part with your hard-earned cash.

There are only so many hours in the day that your child can learn. Do not spend any extra money unless you can see a suitable product with a direct benefit for your child, which suits their personality and learning style. Throwing lots of money at specialists or buying expensive learning resources as a way of helping your dyslexic child is not going to make the dyslexia go away, or ease your high levels of anxiety and emotion. At this time your child needs an ongoing commitment from you, not your money.

“If you choose to buy any learning or teaching resources they must be directly beneficial, time efficient, fun and rewarding, or all three.”

Teaching resources must provide your child with instant results and teach them in a way that suits them and your family's lifestyle. I recommend that before you make any purchasing decisions, you take a few days to read your child's report, think about it and talk to family members, teachers and any other specialist on your support team. You can always purchase learning resources at a later date after you have processed the report and all the details and decided how best to help your child. Many resources are also available for free if you know where to look.

How To Create A Simple Action Plan To Help Your Child

'Simple' is the key word when creating this plan. If it's too complicated, takes too much planning or time to put into action, there is a good chance it won't happen at all. Maybe you will start full of good intentions and then your job, housework, ballet practise, soccer training or just plain exhaustion will get in the way. It really does have to be simple. So what are the features of a simple plan that you need to consider?

- ✓ Aim to allow for ten minutes of time each day. Create short sharp blocks of ten minute activities you can do with your son or daughter. It can be one ten minute session per day or two or three depending on your child and your available time. I recommend short sessions each day simply because it's more easily achievable. It is important to understand that it should never become a drag for either party.

“Regular practise not only makes perfect.
It also makes learning permanent.”

Ten minutes can be utilised in bed before your child sleeps at night, before school, after school, while you are waiting at the train station or in the car to pick up another child from music practice. It's do-able for busy parents and tired children.

“Daily repetitive practice to learn and remember new information has a simple, scientifically proven premise – brain neurones that fire together wire together, helping to make learning permanent.”

✓ Plan when you will do it – if you write it down, it is more likely to happen. Don't make too much of a fuss about it. Put the emphasis on spending time together with your son or daughter, not working

on tasks to overcome dyslexia – this should be the outcome.

- ✓ Consider others who can assist you in providing a session each day if you have restrictions on your time. Make it someone your child likes or looks up to. It could be your spouse, partner, supportive siblings, extended family, the mature teenager up the street who is looking for some extra cash, paid or unpaid tutors or teachers or teacher aides who can help before or after school. Childcare workers can also be a great resource, as can past teachers and family friends. Many activities can also be utilised, which do not require constant supervision. You can get them started and then make a note of their results at the end.
- ✓ Now consider your child's dyslexic strengths and weakness. If you have your diagnostic report, refer to it. If not, use your knowledge of what your child does well to provide you with the key to

what type of activities will be effective and how you need to teach them.

- ✓ To decide what skills you are going to cover, you could take direction from your child, your child's teacher or you could utilise your own observations. You can focus on one skill like spelling, or choose a range across subject and skill areas. In the eBook titled 'Increasing Your Child's Confidence' we discuss how to identify your child's main issue of concern – sometimes this is a good place to start.
- ✓ You also have to consider whether you are going to teach your child based on their current school work, for instance spelling words or times tables for that week, or will your emphasis be on teaching them skills for long term education? Are you more concerned with a higher mark for their spelling test at school that week or teaching spelling skills for life? There is no right or wrong

answer here. Maybe you could do a bit of both.

- ✓ Another important factor to consider is your child's enjoyment level. Your child has enough stress every day just getting through school; there is no need to add to this burden. Research shows that if a child enjoys learning and feels confident and successful during the process, a happy chemical called dopamine is released in their brain. This in turn assists the learning by helping to cement it in their long-term memory.
- ✓ Here's why you need to be creative. Schools predominantly teach using static, formal methods. Your child sits still on the mat or at their desk, listens to the instructions and completes the task in their book as described by the teacher. I'm sure you remember this method when you were at school. It does not tend to benefit a dyslexic child, who generally possesses auditory and/or visual processing difficulties. Think

outside the square. Teach spelling while your son jumps on a trampoline, use highlighters to circle words in magazines, give your child a whistle to blow every time she sees a full stop when you are reading her a story, use audio books and board games.

For 100's of ideas on how you can quickly and effectively teach your dyslexic child, go to www.dyslexiadaily.com and access the world's biggest internet resource directory available for dyslexics. You will also find free downloadable eBooks on how to reach your dyslexic child to 'Read, Write and Spell' and do 'Math'.

- ✓ As you develop your action plan for your child, consider your goals. If it helps write them down, something like;

'By the end of 3rd term Jack will be typing at 30 words per minute with no errors'.

Or

'By the 3rd of October, Jill will be able to accurately write and spell 20 of her most used sight words.'

Or it may even be something like

'By the end of 2nd term, Zach will be happy to go to school.'

- ✓ Older children can help you to set these goals, making them more proactive in attempting to meet the target. Alternatively, if goals are not being met it is always important to have a discussion as to why this is the case and how this can be rectified.
- ✓ It is a good idea to learn as you go. Be flexible and improve your system as you discover what works for both you and your child.

A Tiny Spark

A tiny spark
A flicker of recognition
A hint of a smile
You know it made sense
You know you got through
A rainbow is forming

by Liz Dunoon

About The Author

Liz Dunoon is a teacher and a mother to three children all with dyslexia. It was through her own research to find ways to help her children that she discovered a huge divide between what is known by scientists about dyslexia and what is happening in our children's schools today.

Liz's determination to rectify this has culminated in her working with some of the world's leading dyslexia researchers to write this empowering, but simple and easy to read eBook.

Liz has also created a website full of free information, worksheets, resources, teaching aids, reports, interviews and personal stories. From one parent to another you will soon realise that you are not alone in your quest to support your child.



Liz Dunoon is also the author of:

Helping Children with Dyslexia

21 Super Strategies to Ensure Your Child's Success at School.

N.B. This eBook is an excerpt from this book

EBooks

Guide for Teaching Your Dyslexic Child to Read from Home

Guide for Teaching Your Dyslexic Child to Write and Spell from Home

Guide for teaching Your Dyslexic Child to Do Math from Home

Available from the website

www.dyslexiadaily.com