

Supporting Your School Age Child

How can I help
my child with
dyslexia and
make their life
easier at school?

by Liz Dunoon



dyslexiadaily.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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CONTENTS

Why You Need To Take The Time To Meet With Your Child’s Teachers Before Every School Year Commences	1
Why You Need To Stay In Touch With The Learning Support Teacher	2
Why It Is Critical To Use Email To Stay In Touch With Your Child’s Teachers.....	3
An Example Of An Email To A Teacher	5
How To Repair A Communication Breakdown Between Parents, Teachers And School	5
The Apology Approach.....	7
Dealing With A Problem Teacher	8
Why It Is Important To Keep A Logbook For Your Child.....	9
Why An Accurate Diagnosis Is Critical To The Support Your Child Will Receive At School	10
Legal Protection For Your Child With Dyslexia	13
15 Strategies To Ensure Your Child With Dyslexia Has A Good Day At School	14
Let Your Child’s Teacher Know What Your Child Needs In A Teacher	17
About The Author	20

Why You Need To Take The Time To Meet With Your Child's Teachers Before Every School Year Commences

You do this for a number of reasons:

1. To lower your protective parent anxiety levels
2. To help your child feel less anxious about beginning the school year
3. To develop a rapport with the teachers from day one, which is important as teachers become a critical part of your support team. It is imperative that they understand what being dyslexic means for your child
4. To ensure they understand the intricacies of your child's disability.

At the meeting, give the teacher any examples or copies of your child's past work, relevant school reports or specialist reports you may have. Provide them with a short summary of your child's strengths and weaknesses in point form; don't forget to include the psychological

aspects. Give them an indication of your child's favourite methods of learning. Add the names of any of your child's classmates who are helpful and supportive of your child and their needs.

In your conversation, include any learning or teaching support structures that your child is used to or may have found helpful in the past. This may include support teachers, alternative formats, extra time etc. It is often the case that the parent is the only communication link between a child's year level teachers.

Make sure you also speak with any other specialist teachers who will come into contact with your child. It only takes one small comment or incident to shatter your child's confidence and ruin their day or week.

This simple meeting alone can mean the difference between your child having a happy school year and working to the best of their ability as opposed to having a disastrous year.

“When researching this book I spoke to many teachers. Many said they were often told a child in their class had a learning disability, but not what this meant or how to provide individualised assistance to this child.”

Your child's teacher needs you as much as you need them. Don't assume that because they are a qualified teacher they understand your child's disability or what your child's individual needs are. An educated parent invariably becomes the expert.

Why You Need To Stay In Touch With The Learning Support Teacher

At least twice a year, make an appointment to see your child's learning support teacher. Your child may have been having regular

contact with this teacher via individual or small group lessons. Find out what your child has been doing in these sessions and what progress they are making.

Learning support teachers are often responsible for conducting an annual school based educational assessment on all students at certain age levels. If this is the case, you can ask them to explain the results to you in detail. These results can pinpoint what learning gain your child has made in terms of years and months, based on their chronological age. You can also look at the average gain of the students in your child's class and compare your child to the average.

If this is not a standard assessment at your school, ask your learning support teacher if they are qualified to provide you with this information. It can provide a good general indicator of how your child is progressing. Many children with learning disabilities will be

operating at a considerably lower level than their peers, so focus on their rate of progress as opposed to comparing them to non-dyslexic children.

Developing a good relationship with your child's learning support teacher can also be mutually beneficial for your dyslexic child. If your child is having a particularly rough day, the learning support teacher is often a good person for your child to confide in. They will often have great teaching and learning aids that you can borrow to use at home.

Take the time to discuss with them who they would consider to be the best teacher for your child the following year and why. You can be sure that learning support specialists know exactly who has the right set of skills to help your child. Once you have been given some options, speak to the school Headmaster well before the school year ends to try to have your child allocated to this teacher's class.

Be aware though, that this may mean separating them from their supportive friend network. I would think very carefully about moving them away from their friends, especially in the older grade levels when friends become very important.

Sometimes, knowing who the most appropriate teachers are for your child can point you in the right direction if you decide to go down the path of using one as an after school tutor. Schools will have varying policies on this practise.

Why It Is Critical To Use Email To Stay In Touch With Your Child's Teachers

Endeavour to stay in constant contact with your child's teacher. Staying in regular personal contact is beneficial, but not always easy, so email can be fast, effective and efficient.

Email works both ways and to everyone's benefit. In the busy world we live in, it is a great instant communication tool.

You can keep the teacher informed as to what is affecting your child on any given day, for example;

- ✓ When your child is tired/sick
 - ✓ When something has occurred to make your child anxious or stressed
 - ✓ When they are struggling with a particular school project or homework task
 - ✓ To ask if a learning exercise can be modified to better suit your child
 - ✓ When there is an opportunity to celebrate a personal achievement and reinforce positive self-esteem
 - ✓ When you would like the teacher to help you to achieve a particular goal
- ✓ To ask their advice
 - ✓ To tell them about a new strategy you are employing at home to help your child.

The teacher can also keep you informed:

- ✓ When assessments are coming up. This means you can arrange extra practice if required and help to mentally prepare your child, or it can allow you the opportunity to review the test format and ensure special allowances be made to suit your child
- ✓ When your child has had a particularly challenging day and needs some extra T.L.C. (Tender Loving Care)
- ✓ If your child is having difficulty with a task, so you can assist at home
- ✓ To let you know if an activity can be modified to better suit your child's needs.

An Example Of An Email To A Teacher

Dear Mrs P

I wanted to ask you when you would be changing the seating structure in your classroom again. Ellie is enjoying school, but finds her current position, towards the back of the desks with her back to the whiteboard, difficult. I had her eyes tested last year and she has perfect 20/20 vision.

She is however, coming home mentally exhausted. I know she struggles with the visual concentration required for classroom school work and last night curled up in my lap and asked me if I could speak to you about moving her closer to the front.

I am working hard with her at home to help her to keep up with her classmates and increase her automatic reading rates, using the flash cards you provided me.

I believe there has been a little jump in her literacy skills just recently and her confidence is increasing.

Let me know if is possible to move her. I would appreciate your feedback.

Have a great day

Glenda Patterson

How To Repair A Communication Breakdown Between Parents, Teachers And School

When our child is constantly struggling at school and they are beginning to exhibit signs of emotional stress, we as parents can also become distressed. No one likes to see their child in pain, whether emotionally or physically. Having a child with a learning disability can cause emotions to run high, as we want the problems to be rectified. We want solutions to be found and the pain our

child is feeling to go away as quickly as possible. In many cases, parents wait too long before they go into the classroom to raise an issue, which is causing distress, making them ripe for an altercation with a classroom teacher.

Teachers are often on the receiving end of our angst as we seek to understand and find answers to our questions and concerns. It is not difficult to become frustrated by the school system when we are seeking change in the lives of our struggling children and none seems to be forthcoming. So what can we do when the relationship between parents and teachers sours and our children are suffering as a result?

“I am a great believer in communication and this is often the best way to overcome a soured parent teacher relationship. A communication breakdown is to our detriment and more importantly to that of our struggling child. They will be the biggest loser in this scenario.”

Here are four options to consider, depending on your situation:

1. Find a teacher, specialist or parent who can mediate on your behalf. You can explain your child's situation to this individual and ask that they assist you to rectify the communication breakdown to help you to find solutions for your struggling child within the school system

2. Wait until the end of the year when you can get a new teacher, start fresh and move on. This can take time though and your child needs constant ongoing support
3. Change schools because you are not getting anywhere with the school hierarchy
4. Repair the damaged relationship between yourself and your child's teacher and move forward together in an effort to support your dyslexic child.

You have the right to advocate on behalf of your child and choose any path you wish, but if you choose to try to repair the damaged relationship here is one suggestion.

The Apology Approach

Make an appointment to speak to your child's teacher. During the meeting, apologise to the teacher for your handling of the situation to date. Explain to them the reason for your tone and your choice of

words when you speak to them. You need to reiterate that this is a direct result of the worry and fear you feel for your struggling child.

You might be thinking 'Is she mad? There's no way I'm going to lower myself and apologise to that hopeless teacher'. An apology, although hard to give, is a great way to wipe the slate clean, get teacher's back on your side and move forward as a team once again. Explain to the teacher that you just want some reassurance that your child is receiving the best opportunity possible to operate at their full potential.

Everyone can relate to feelings of despair and worry. Being humble often takes courage, but this is a strategy that can work to get parent/teacher communication back on track. Teachers will often become more sympathetic to your plight and more proactive on your child's behalf.

Dealing With A Problem Teacher

At some time you will most likely encounter a teacher or a school Headmaster who is inflexible, uneducated and unwilling to make concessions for your child. This often comes down to their personality, their style of teaching or leadership and the classroom standards they enforce. These teachers can be very intolerant, hostile and verbally abusive towards your struggling child. If your child's self-confidence is taking a battering you need to take action fast. You can tackle this scenario in a number of ways:

1. Seek to educate the teacher. Build them up by making them feel like they are the dyslexic experts. Do this by providing them with educational material and strategies and then asking for their feedback
2. Use another teacher from within the school with a proven track record of effectively

teaching children with learning disabilities to speak to this teacher and advocate on your child's behalf

3. If you have the time, volunteer in your child's classroom to get a sense of what is occurring
4. Ask the school Headmaster to intervene
5. Ask other parents if they have witnessed any verbal abuse or mistreatment of your child – document and date their responses if relevant. It is more powerful to have proof when you are seeking a solution from authorities
6. If all these strategies fail, get your child away from this teacher as fast as possible. Arrange counselling if necessary and start considering your options whether this means changing schools, contacting educational authorities or seeking legal advice.

Why It Is Important To Keep A Logbook For Your Child

From the moment you suspect that your child is not learning at the same rate as others and may have a problem, it is very important to keep a record of your observations. If you have a work diary you can use that or if you prefer keep a notebook handy. When appropriate, jot notes into it. Make sure you always include the date.

There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly it is often hard to be objective about our own children, so writing down our observations can help us to clarify our thoughts. Secondly this logbook will become a resource you can refer to when you are seeking assistance for your child.

“I would recommend a special notebook. Date and record every contact; personal, phone or email. Make a note of who said what and what outcomes were agreed. Keep copies of every note and letters sent and received. Accurate records can become a powerful negotiating tool.”

Margaret Hardy, Dyslexia Testing
Services Australia

You should include:

- ✓ Any specific difficulties with learning you might observe. For example: ‘Tyler keeps complaining of headaches when reading his reader’, or ‘Eliza keeps misreading small words of two letters – sometimes missing them altogether’.

- ✓ Keep a record of any meetings you have with your child's teachers. Include who was present, what was discussed and what the outcome was.
- ✓ Include any specialist appointments you have. These could include specialists from within the school or in the wider community. Again, make a note of who was present, what was discussed and what the outcome was.
- ✓ Make a note of any support strategies you are using or any educational programs that are being offered to your child. Include when they started, what is involved, how long the program runs for and how they are being measured. It is also a good idea to make a note of what your child thought of the program.
- ✓ Keep a record of any verbal reference your child makes to being treated badly by students or teaching staff. At the same time always include references to positive school experiences your child

has in relation to particular students, teachers or school events.

- ✓ Keep a file for your child of any documentation that is being generated in relation to your child's education. This can include letters, reports, contact lists etc.

Why An Accurate Diagnosis Is Critical To The Support Your Child Will Receive At School

Get your child formally diagnosed. 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.

A diagnostic report can be an important tool for parents because it establishes that your

child has a diagnosed learning disability. If you have had unhelpful teachers and Headmasters in the past, this factual document cannot be ignored and requests instant action be taken on behalf of your child to assist them.

A formal diagnosis can, depending on your school and the state in which your child attends school, allow for remediation, modification and accommodation.

A remediation

A remediation refers directly to a learning program that caters to your child's identified areas of weakness. This invariably means your child may leave class to have access to a learning support teacher and a program that is intensive, direct, multisensory and systematic. It is worth asking whether the programs your school uses are scientifically proven as some states in certain countries have a prerequisite for this to be the case.

A modification

A modification refers to changes made to the year level curriculum to cater for your child, such as:

- ✓ Rewriting grade level expectations
- ✓ Reducing the number of curriculum expectations to be mastered
- ✓ Writing alternative expectations for your child
- ✓ Selecting expectations from a different grade level

“Curriculum modifications are not always appropriate. It is better to try and maintain grade level expectations and modify the environment or the response mode so that children can complete work at their intellectual level.”

Dr. Paul Whiting

An accommodation

An accommodation refers to any assistance that enables your child to access the grade appropriate curriculum. These can vary considerably but may include:

- ✓ The use of teaching methods deemed more appropriate for your child
- ✓ Extra personalised assistance in the school classroom
- ✓ The extra provision of time to complete certain projects, tests and exams
- ✓ The option for your child to sit tests and exams in an alternative area. This can mean they feel less pressured during exams. They may be placed in a room where there is less noise and minimal distraction
- ✓ The provision of a teacher's aide to read questions for your child on certain tests and exams
- ✓ The provision of a scribe to write answers for your child in certain tests and exams
- ✓ The option for your child to read aloud the written questions on tests
- ✓ Not being penalised and having marks deducted for spelling errors when spelling is not the focus of the evaluation
- ✓ Access to recorded audio text books
- ✓ Complete oral assessments
- ✓ Use of electronic spellers
- ✓ Using a laptop to complete classroom work instead of writing
- ✓ Recording lessons so they can listen to them again at a later date
- ✓ Access to a peer note taker
- ✓ Changes to the font size, paper colour and amount of text per page on written tests

- ✓ Use of voice recognition software for writing and print to speech software for reading text

Use this information to find out and secure the education considerations for your dyslexic child. This may be in the form of a Learning Support Plan or similar document, which is created specifically for your child and sets out what the school is putting in place to support your child. It is important that parents are involved in this process to ensure a complete understanding of what is being organised to help your child and how it will be evaluated.

Legal Protection For Your Child With Dyslexia

Every state of every English speaking country in the world has a different set of legal standards for dyslexic students as described in the eBook "How To Get A Diagnosis". It pays to be aware of your legal rights.

“In Australia there is no legal right to assessment, but once a child is assessed and diagnosed with dyslexia, then the Anti-Discrimination Act protects children’s rights through the Disability Standards for Education 2005. All educational institutions in Australia must provide appropriate support for students diagnosed with a disability including dyslexia.”

Margaret Hardy, Dyslexia Testing Services Australia

In other countries where the law is not so definitive dyslexic assessments can still be obtained, but this is not always a legal right.

You can find out more information on this topic by searching on the internet for your particular area’s Department of Education and then go to the ‘special education’ link.

There should be information for you to access online. There are also lawyers who specialise in representing children with learning disabilities.

Be aware if you decide to take legal action against your educational authority, win your case and are awarded damages and a monetary payout is forthcoming. The payment is often taken out of the state's education budget.

Please be aware legal action can be time consuming and expensive, which may take your valuable time and resources away from supporting your child.

15 Strategies To Ensure Your Child With Dyslexia Has A Good Day At School

1. Ensure your child consistently gets a good night's sleep. Children with dyslexia often have difficulty operating at their full potential when they are tired.
2. Make sure they eat a healthy substantial breakfast. This will put fuel in their tank and give them energy to learn. On this same note, make sure you provide them with a healthy lunch and dinner as well, including some whole foods. If you allow them to eat high sugar, high fat, over processed junk food, expect their brain capacity, concentration and behaviour to be rubbishy too.
3. Make sure they have a good supply of fresh, cool water to drink throughout the day. This keeps the blood supply flowing to their hard working brain. Many schools are happy for students to take insulated refillable water bottles into the classroom these days.
4. Create a standard weekly schedule for school and afterschool activities. Include on this schedule which uniform your child is expected to wear on a certain day, a list of all items that need to go in their school bag each day and pencil in any additional activities that need to be taken into consideration.

5. Provide them with a monthly wall calendar so they can plan tasks ahead to ensure they allow plenty of time to research, work in stages, and take their time. You may also like to provide them with a yearly planner to allow them to keep track of tasks and time on a larger scale.
6. Encourage them to utilise the best time of the day to practise their reading or complete their homework. Some children with dyslexia work much better in the mornings than the afternoons and evenings.
7. If homework is taking longer than is suggested for your child's year level, it is important to contact your child's teacher. Children with dyslexia should not be spending hours struggling with homework after school. It pays to keep teachers informed if this is occurring.
8. Write a note to remind you of any additional communication that needs to occur that day between yourself and a particular teacher or specialist. For example: Email Mr B about Rebecca's exam accommodations.
9. Give your child access to a computer and a typing tutor program. Word processing can be a major bonus for many dyslexic children. The earlier they learn the better.
10. Help your child to organise their personal space and belongings and then encourage them to keep them organised. This may mean having a place to store all the items that need to go backwards and forwards to school throughout the week. Perhaps there could be a series of coloured plastic paper trays for school tasks that need to be completed today, this week, this month or this term. Provide them with access to a desk in a quiet part of the house where they can complete their homework.
11. For middle and senior school students it can be helpful to hire a second set of

school textbooks – one set for home and one set for school. Many school textbooks are also available in electronic formats, which can be a useful tool for your child.

12. Be available to support your child when school tasks become overwhelming. It only takes a few minutes to help your child to clarify their thoughts and put a process in place to give them the confidence to tackle a school task. Take into account a timeline to complete the task to ensure it remains achievable for them.
13. Monitor the amount of television they watch and computer games they play. There have been hundreds of research studies on this, but to keep it simple I call the TV the brain draining, grumpy box. In my household it seems to drain my children of productive mental energy, while causing a major decline in attitude and behaviour. You may need to do some research on this in your household. If you decide to wean them off electronic media, I can warn you it will take about

three weeks before they stop asking for it. Replace it with all kinds of before and after school activities. These can include cooking, swimming, sport, charity work, playing at friend's houses, building cubby houses, gardening, visiting grandparents etc. My children are not allowed to access electronic media (unless educational) between Monday and Thursday. Find the compromise that suits your children best. Too much TV causes brain drain in my opinion. Remember, don't just exclude your child with dyslexia; it must be one rule for all to be fair.

14. According to Dr. Alexandra Richardson, it is very important to provide your child with enough Omega 3 fatty acids every day. The best source is oily fish such as herring, mackerel or salmon. Dr. Alexandra Richardson is one of the UK's leading authorities on the impact of nutrition and environment on the brain. Through her research she has brought hope and help to 1000's of children with learning disabilities. Much research

indicates that both Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids are vital nutritional supplements, as they cannot be made within the human body, yet they are critical to cellular structure and optimal brain performance. Omega 6 fatty acids tend to be in excess in modern diets, but few people eat enough oily fish, so the correct Omega 3's (EPA & DHA) tend to be in short supply. Her research studies indicates that supplements of these fatty acids can promote improvements in behaviour, increases in concentration levels and better learning outcomes for children with learning disabilities, among many other benefits. Experts recommend 500mg of EPA and DHA (long chain highly unsaturated fatty acids – LC H.U.F.A.s). Omega 3, specifically EPA and DHA, is readily available in the form of fish oil capsules. Make sure you check the contents and amounts on the label as many fish oil tablets do not provide what is recommended. Please refer to Dr Alexandra Richardson's book,

'They Are What You Feed Them' for more important information on this topic.

15. Always keep communications lines open on a daily basis. Your child with dyslexia needs to know that no matter how busy family life gets you are always available to talk to them.

Let Your Child's Teacher Know What Your Child Needs In A Teacher

If you were to ask your dyslexic child for an instruction manual to create the perfect teacher, what would it include? It seems that some teachers are easy to learn from and others are not. The South Cumbria Dyslexia Association, UK and the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), UK, surveyed dyslexic pupils about how teachers made learning - easy or difficult. Some of the

dyslexic pupils' comments are listed below. Why not use this information to ask your child's

teachers if they could put some of these practices in place to assist your dyslexic child.

- At the start of the lesson, be clear about what you want us to do
- Don't give too many instructions too fast
- Show us how to do something as well as tell us. Use pictures and structural material – these make it easier to understand
- Be prepared to repeat the instructions
- Teach the basic information – 'without rambling on about other things'
- Show enthusiasm for the subject
- Let us ask questions – check that we are doing it right
- Proactively check we are doing it right
- Smile when we ask for help – explain it again and do at least two examples with us
- Write things neatly and clearly – preferably on a white board
- Leave instructions/spellings etc. on the board for a long time
- Help when we get stuck
- Be patient with our mistakes and when we need help
- Be nice to us – please do not shout when we get it wrong
- Number lines at both ends – different coloured lines can also be helpful
- Prepare notes to minimise copying from the board
- Put homework instructions in audio formats or on the school website

- Accept and encourage work to be presented in different forms – audio, web cam, oral responses etc. ‘You choose the best way to show me what you know for this task’
- Create a peaceful environment in the class.

“Never lose heart and never give up. Parents and teachers are often the critical point of difference in the life of a dyslexic child.”

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