

YOUR CHILD HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH

DYSLEXIA

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN AND NEXT STEPS



WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

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Dyslexia is a type of Learning Disability. 🍎¹ It involves a weakness in the part of the brain that processes the sounds of written language while reading or spelling. It results in difficulty sounding out and reading words, slow and effortful reading, difficulties spelling, and difficulty finding the right word when speaking or mispronouncing words.

- It is a brain-based disorder. Dyslexic readers use different areas of the brain than skilled readers do while reading. 🍎²
- Dyslexia leads to slow and effortful reading – extra time spent decoding or recognizing words makes it hard to keep up with peers and makes it hard to understand what has been read.
- Reading comprehension problems happen because of trouble sounding out words, not because of trouble understanding language.
- Dyslexia is not a temporary lag in reading that is outgrown. With proper reading instruction and reading intervention, reading improves, but it often remains more effortful than for individuals without Dyslexia. This is why assistive technology (AT) is often introduced to work around these reading challenges. Technology such as text-to-speech programs allows individuals with Dyslexia to hear information that they need to read, which frees up mental energy to use for comprehension.
- Dyslexia is not a problem with the visual system. Individuals with Dyslexia see things the same way as everyone else. However, they have an underlying difficulty identifying speech sounds within a word (phonological awareness) and connecting speech sounds (i.e. the b says /b/) to their letters and letter combinations (orthography) – necessary abilities for reading and spelling.
- Symptoms of Dyslexia range from mild to severe.
- Dyslexia runs in families; having a family member with Dyslexia increases your chance of having Dyslexia.

HWDSB
BE YOU. BE EXCELLENT.

Because connecting words and sounds is harder for people with Dyslexia, this can also lead to:

- Hesitant speech
- Using fillers like 'umm'
- Difficulty finding words and finding words at the right time or on the spot when speaking
- Using vague language like 'things'
- Pronouncing words incorrectly
- Substituting similar-sounding words (i.e., saying lotion rather than ocean)
- When spelling, mixing up letter order (i.e. emeny instead of enemy) or having difficulty recalling the letter or letter pattern in words (orthographic processing)
- Difficulty being able to rapidly name things (e.g., objects, animals, colours, shapes, letters)

PEOPLE WITH DYSLEXIA

In spite of the challenges with reading and writing, individuals with Dyslexia also have many strengths and talents. Dyslexia is the **most common Learning Disability**. Many successful individuals have Dyslexia. Some well-known individuals with Dyslexia are: Albert Einstein (scientist), Agatha Christie (author), Lewis Hamilton (race car driver), Magic Johnson (athlete), Tom Holland (actor) and Jennifer Aniston (actress). With the right support, accommodations, and mindset, dyslexia does not limit success. Today, there are many tools to allow individuals with Dyslexia to work around their challenges with reading and writing.

PEOPLE WITH DYSLEXIA CAN LEARN TO READ

Dyslexia cannot be outgrown, but with proper instruction, reading can improve.

Children's brains can physically change with intensive, explicit, systematic reading instruction based on the science of reading—this brain rewiring occurs as reading improves. 🍎³

The earlier we intervene, the better chance we have to improve reading and spelling.

More information about how reading develops can be found [here](#).

SOME MYTHS ABOUT DYSLEXIA

It is **not** a problem with the way people with Dyslexia see things, they see the same way as everyone else. It is not letters moving on the page, and there is no evidence that coloured lenses or overlays have any effect on word reading or comprehension for individuals with Dyslexia.



A
B

It is **not** seeing letters and numbers backward (many young children reverse letters and numbers during early development).

It is **not** a temporary lag in reading skills due to lack of/or inadequate instruction.

It is **not** a sign of low intelligence. Individuals with high intelligence can struggle to read, while others with lower intelligence can learn to read with ease.

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE DIAGNOSIS

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

- Have a conversation with your child's teacher or Learning Resource Teacher (LRT) about what reading intervention your child will be receiving at school.
- Ask your child's teacher to send home activities to practice the skills being taught.
- If your child is part of a small reading intervention at school, ask for activities you can do at home that can help your child practice the skills being taught in this group.
- Consider discussing whether your child needs accommodations. Accommodations provide students with access to schoolwork that has the same expectations as their peers but removes barriers specific to their Learning Disability.
- In addition to receiving targeted reading instruction, your child may use assistive technology (AT) in the classroom such as using an iPad or laptop. 🍎⁴

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD AT HOME

- Ensure your child understands why reading is challenging for them. You may want to consider asking the person who did the assessment to have a conversation with your child about Dyslexia.
- Help your child participate in an interest or hobby where they can have a positive experience and see themselves as competent and skilled. This can help build their confidence.
- Ensure your child continues reading, even over school holidays and summer break. A child can lose as much as half of the gains they made in a school year over the summer months. Even just a few minutes a day can help prevent the losses—think of reading like a muscle; the more we work at it, the stronger it gets.
- Encourage your child to read books in alternative formats (i.e., audiobooks or electronic books that can be read to them). This will allow your child to access books at a higher level so that they can read independently. Books, no matter how they are accessed (reading or listening), help to build vocabulary and knowledge.
- Teach typing skills from an early age. Many fun typing games on the internet can help build keyboarding skills (i.e., typingclub.com, nitrotype.com, typing.com). To fully benefit from assistive technology, an individual must be able to type 20-30 words per minute.
- Use *sneaky* learning activities. For example, leaving closed captions on tv, video games and memes; singing karaoke; reading a recipe; reading signs while driving; reading menus or flyers; and helping to make a shopping list.
- If you are considering working with a tutor, it is important that the program is evidence-based and follows a proven model and that the tutor gives you regular feedback about your child's progress. 🍎⁵

THE BENEFITS OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)

- Allows students to access reading material at grade level, which may be above their independent reading ability but in line with their comprehension ability. This helps them to continue to build vocabulary and background knowledge at the same rate as their classmates.
- Allows students to work independently and engage in activities alongside their classmates (inclusion).
- Allows students to demonstrate their learning, ideas, and skills more easily by working around their reading and spelling challenges.
- If your child has been prescribed Assistive Technology, they should also be given reading materials in a format that can be read with technology (i.e., pdf, Word, or digital format)
- Check out programs such as [Microsoft Reading Coach](#), [Microsoft Immersive Reader](#) and [Microsoft Dictate](#)



WHAT A STUDENT WITH DYSLEXIA REQUIRES:

It is critical that a student with Dyslexia receives reading support that targets their gaps in reading skills. Reading is more than just decoding. An individual must read accurately and quickly (fluency), and they also must understand what they are reading (comprehension).

Instruction must be:

- **Direct and explicit:** each skill, rule, and strategy for reading and spelling must be taught clearly and directly, starting at the level identified by an early reading screener
- **Systematic and structured:** follows a plan that shows what will be taught (scope) and the order it will be taught in (sequence). This ensures that learning begins at the most basic level required and moves gradually into more complex concepts. It builds on previous knowledge and ensures the student doesn't miss learning any key skills
- **Multisensory:** uses techniques that incorporate multiple senses (e.g., seeing, hearing, and doing)
- **Cumulative:** skills are taught in small steps with constant review and practice of previously learned skills
- **Intensive:** require a greater frequency and intensity of instruction than is needed for most other students
- Include **measurable goals and monitoring of progress:** ongoing assessment to ensure that your child is responding to the instruction they are being given, making adjustments when your child is not meeting the goals and progress

This type of instruction in **phonological awareness** (identifying and working with the sounds in language), **phonics** (connecting letters with the sounds they make), and **word-level reading** (decoding) can actually re-train and re-wire the brain of a student with Dyslexia. Although early intervention is best, individuals with Dyslexia can be helped at any age.

DYSLEXIA ALSO IMPACTS LIFE OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

Dyslexia does not just impact achievement at school; it can also make it difficult to complete activities of daily living. Here are some tasks that can be challenging for individuals with Dyslexia.

EVERYDAY TASKS:

- Reading menus, signs, or forms can be confusing.
- Filling out paperwork at places like doctor's offices can be a challenge.
- Understanding written directions can be difficult.

TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION:

- They often make typing and spelling errors in texts and emails.
- Navigating websites or apps with lots of reading can be hard.
- Miscommunication can happen when processing language is difficult.

SELF-ESTEEM AND MENTAL HEALTH:

- They might feel frustrated and anxious while reading or writing.
- They may avoid situations that could show their difficulties.
- They can feel misunderstood by others.
- Distracted by fear that they may be asked to read aloud.

DRIVING AND NAVIGATION:

- They may have trouble reading road signs and following GPS directions.
- Studying and completing written driving tests or manuals can be challenging.

WORKPLACE CHALLENGES:

- They may struggle to read or write emails and reports quickly.
- It can be hard to follow written instructions or take notes in meetings.
- They might have trouble managing their time and staying organized.



IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT DYSLEXIA:

Helping your child better understand their learning needs can help them become more confident and better prepared to advocate for themselves.

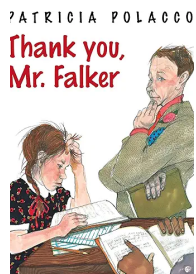
Here are a few ways to explain Dyslexia to your child:

- You are smart and capable. Dyslexia means that your brain has a different way of figuring out words, sounds, and letters, which makes learning to read and spell more challenging, or makes reading and writing take longer. It can also make it more challenging to find the words you are looking for when talking.
- It is common, and you are not the only one in your class or school.
- Difficulties with reading and writing do not disappear, but they will get easier with the use of strategies and hard work. Dyslexia will not stop you from achieving your goals or from being successful at anything you choose to work on.
- Now that we know more about what is causing these difficulties, we will be able to work on a plan to help you read and write more easily and faster.

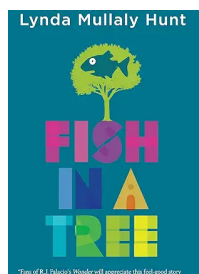
Here are some ways to help your child learn to speak up for themselves:

- Help your child practice asking for help using clear statements such as: "I need help with....." or "I learn better when I see things. Can you please explain it again by showing me how to...?"
- Try role-playing different challenges your child may face, such as explaining their learning differences and what they need from friends or other family members.
- Talk with your child about their strengths and accomplishments. Set goals together and celebrate their progress in working towards achieving these goals.
- Encourage your child to join a school meeting and learn more about strategies included in their Individual Education Plan (IEP).

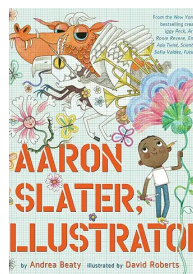
Books that explain Dyslexia to children and older students/adults:



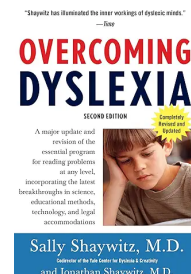
Thank You, Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco



Fish in a Tree by Lynda Mullaly



Aaron Slater, Illustrator by Andrea Beaty



Overcoming Dyslexia by Sally Shaywitz, M.D.

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES THAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME TO BUILD READING SKILLS:

PHONEMIC AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

(Identifying and using the sounds of language)

Play sound games with your child – have them break words into their individual sounds (e.g., ship /sh/i/p/); ask your child what happens when you take away a sound from a word (e.g., what happens to sweep when we take away the /s/ sound - weep); ask your child to tell you the new word if you change a sound from the beginning, middle, or end of the word (e.g., what happens to chair if you change /ch/ to /b/ - bear).

Combining these sound games with a hands-on component is also helpful. For example, clapping or tapping out syllables or pushing forward an object (block, chip), when breaking words apart into their sounds.

ACCURATE AND FLUENT READING OF TEXT

(Ability to read quickly and accurately with expression)

Repeated reading: Choose a passage at your child's reading level. You first read the passage to your child. Then, you and your child read the passage together out loud multiple times. Then your child reads the passage out loud on own.

Recording-assisted reading: After hearing a recorded passage or book several times, your child reads along with the recording and practices until they are able to read the text fluently (Tumble books can be used).

ALPHABETIC PRINCIPLE AND PHONICS

(Learning the relationships between letter(s) and sound and apply this knowledge to decode and spell words)

Word ladders – start with one word and challenge your child to come up with new words by changing only one letter at the beginning, middle, or end of word (e.g., line live five fine).

Play Scrabble Slam (similar to Word Ladders).

Use multisensory strategies such as skywriting for using large muscle movements to write the words in the air while simultaneously saying the letters (i.e. Jolly Phonics).

Use manipulatives such as letter tiles or magnetic letters to build or manipulate words.

READING COMPREHENSION

(Understanding what you read)

Build vocabulary - When working on vocabulary, make sure that your child pronounces and uses the word in a sentence, which will help them remember the word in a meaningful way.

Encourage your child to monitor their comprehension as they're reading; while reading aloud with your child, ask questions and model your thinking (e.g., "I wonder why this character feels this way"), and encourage them to ask questions they have about the text.

Encourage your child to make predictions about the text you are reading (e.g., What do you think Tommy will do next?). After reading, evaluate the predictions that were made.

DYSLEXIA RESOURCES

Informational Websites:

Dyslexia Canada (<https://dyslexiacanada.org>)

International Dyslexia Association Ontario Branch (<https://idaontario.com>)

Canada's Centre for Dyslexia (<https://centrefordyslexia.ca>)

University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) (<https://ufl.edu>)

Reading Rockets (<https://www.readingrockets.org/>)

Skill Building Websites:



Epic!
(<https://www.getepic.com/>)



Starfall
(<https://www.starfall.com/h/>)



Nessy
<https://www.nessy.com/en-us>



Getting Ready for Post-Secondary:

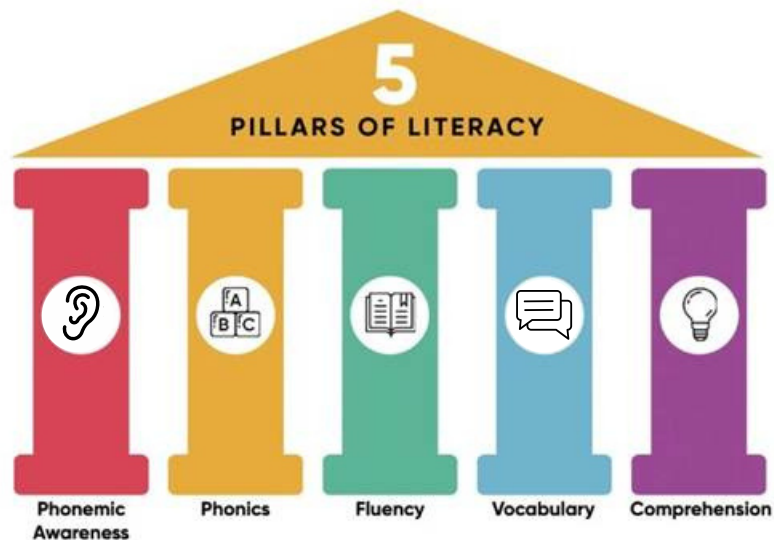
Regional Assessment and Resource Centre (RARC) (<https://www.queensu.ca/rarc/>)

Transition Resource Guide for Students with Disabilities (<https://www.transitionresourceguide.ca/>)

Local chapters of LDAO (<https://www.ldao.ca/>) & Centre for Diverse Learners
(<https://diverselearners.ca/>)

HOW READING DEVELOPS

Our brains were wired to learn how to walk and talk; they are not wired to read.
Learning to read and write needs to be directly taught.



Research has identified 5 pillars of reading:



Phonemic Awareness: The ability to identify and work with the speech sounds in words (i.e., cat has 3 sounds c-a-t; if you change the c in cat to b, cat becomes bat)



Phonics: The relationship between the written letters and the sound it makes (i.e., the letter "b" makes the "buh" sound. We use this knowledge to sound out and spell words)



Fluency: The ability to read words quickly and accurately (good readers will recognize words automatically through a process called orthographic mapping - see *word know word*)



Vocabulary: The words a person knows and uses (i.e., words understood when listening and reading and used when speaking or writing)



Comprehension: Ability to understand what you hear or read (i.e., you can only understand what you read if it's at the same level as what you can understand when listening)

Individuals with Dyslexia have difficulty with the first three pillars of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency). However, if individuals with Dyslexia read less than their peers, their vocabulary development may slow down, which may then impact their comprehension. That is why accessing grade-level books in alternative formats, such as audiobooks or text-to-speech, is so important for individuals with Dyslexia.

All readers, even Dyslexic readers, must learn to read the same way:

- First, we learn that the words we hear can be broken down into sounds (phonemic awareness).
- Then we connect letters with their sounds (alphabetic principle/phonics) – each time we learn a new connection (e.g. sh stands for the /sh/ sound at the beginning of ship), a tiny part of our brain gets rewired.
- Then, using the knowledge of sound-letter relationships, we start to sound out words (decoding/word reading).
- When we master the conversion of letters to sounds, we can store printed words and their sounds in our long-term memory (orthographic mapping). This process happens more naturally for those without Dyslexia.
- With more printed word exposure and reading practice, we become faster and faster in matching words to sounds, and words become recognizable by sight (i.e. sight words). This complex process allows us to read quickly and accurately (reading fluency).
- Once we can read fluently, we start to focus on the meaning of words and sentences (reading comprehension).
- Reading is the process of learning how print relates to the language we already know. We can only understand text that has vocabulary we understand.



1 Learning Disabilities refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency.

Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g. planning and decision-making).

Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:

- oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding);
- reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension);
- written language (e.g. spelling and written expression); and
- mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving).

Learning disabilities may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective taking.

Learning disabilities are lifelong. The way in which they are expressed may vary over an individual's lifetime, depending on the interaction between the demands of the environment and the individual's strengths and needs. Learning disabilities are suggested by unexpected academic under-achievement or achievement which is maintained only by unusually high levels of effort and support.

Learning disabilities are due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors or injury that alters brain functioning in a manner which affects one or more processes related to learning. These disorders are not due primarily to hearing and/or vision problems, socio-economic factors, cultural or linguistic differences, lack of motivation or ineffective teaching, although these factors may further complicate the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities.

Learning disabilities may co-exist with various conditions including attentional, behavioural and emotional disorders, sensory impairments or other medical conditions.

For success, individuals with learning disabilities require early identification and timely specialized assessments and interventions involving home, school, community and workplace settings.

The interventions need to be appropriate for each individual's learning disability subtype and, at a minimum, include the provision of:

- specific skill instruction;
- accommodations;
- compensatory strategies; and
- self-advocacy skills.

* Definition of a Learning Disability from the [Learning Disability Association of Canada \(LDAC\)](#)





2 Individuals with Dyslexia over-rely on areas in the right and front of their brain instead of areas in the left side of the brain; when they read a word, it takes a longer trip through their brain, which results in slow and laboured reading.



3 With effective intervention, the brains of individuals with Dyslexia begin to function more like typical readers (they start to use the left hemisphere more efficiently) while reading, and their reading improves.



4 An example of AT is text-to-speech software that allows electronic text that is above your child's reading level to be read to your child. AT is usually introduced in the fourth grade or later. If your child is using AT to support them in the classroom, ask the teacher to provide all reading material in an electronic format that is compatible with the text-to-speech software.



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