

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a type of learning disability. Specifically, it is a language-based disorder characterized by problems learning to read, write, spell, and decode single-words.

A person with dyslexia has reading skills significantly below what is expected given his/her intelligence and educational experiences.

(National Institute for Literacy)

What are the warning signs?

Children with dyslexia may have difficulty:

- Learning to speak
- Learning letters and their sounds
- Organizing written and spoken language
- Memorizing number facts
- Reading quickly enough to comprehend
- Persisting with and comprehending longer reading assignments
- Spelling

Not all students who have difficulties with these skills are dyslexic. Formal testing is the only way to confirm a diagnosis of suspected dyslexia.

(International Dyslexia Association)

“With proper help, many people with dyslexia can learn to read and write well.” (International Dyslexia Association.)

My child can't read; now what?

When a child exhibits many warning signs or is having an unexpected difficulty reading, gather a team (teachers, parents, and related services) to discuss skill strengths and deficits, background information, and previous evaluations. (School psychologists often review files and work samples, conduct observations and interviews, and may administer informal assessments.)

Next, the team implements an intensive, research-based intervention. If the child's skills do not improve after about 8-10 weeks, the team reconvenes to reevaluate the intervention.

When should you evaluate?

After several well-implemented research-based interventions fail, evaluations are generally conducted.

Who should evaluate?

Trained professionals with completed coursework in educational test administration and interpretation. No single test should be used to diagnose dyslexia. Evaluations are a *process*.

What do you evaluate?

Kindergarten-1st grade: language skills, phonological awareness, memory, rapid naming.

Second grade on: decoding, reading comprehension, spelling, and writing.

Additionally, assess oral language, word recognition, phonological processing, automaticity/fluency, and vocabulary. Intelligence tests may not be necessary, but observations, interviews, file reviews, and a review of previous evaluations are suggested.

(International Dyslexia Association and Shaywitz, S. (2003). Overcoming Dyslexia)

My child has dyslexia; now what?

In South Dakota, your child may qualify for special education services if the following conditions are met:

1. Your child has a disability
2. The disability has an adverse effect on educational performance AND
3. Given the disability and adverse effect, your child requires specialized instruction

Many schools monitor basic reading skills and have intervention groups for struggling readers. Depending on your child's district, he/she may participate in a reading intervention group. If the intervention works, then special education may not be necessary (or appropriate).

South Dakota's special education eligibility criteria are aligned with federal guidelines, which are periodically reauthorized. Presently, SD recognizes 14 categories. Dyslexia is referred to under the specific learning disability category. Most likely students with dyslexia will qualify due to basic reading skill or reading fluency deficits.

The SD Eligibility Guide can be accessed at: <http://doe.sd.gov/oess/specialed/forms/index.asp>

If a child does not qualify for special education (based on the three criteria listed above) a school district can still implement interventions. Research has shown early interventions using an effective reading program (explicit and systematic phonological instruction) can improve reading skills (S. Shaywitz, 2003).

“If there is a way to do it better... find it!” (Thomas Edison)

What can parents/schools do?

Parents

- Be aware, informed, and involved
- Teach young children to listen for letter sounds (i.e.,: same first letter: pig and pen)
- Play rhyming games
- Help your child identify an interest or hobby
- Encourage involvement in extra curricula
- Read and talk to your child
- Help your child understand his/her reading problem and long-term implications
- Monitor for emotional difficulties (anxiety, depression); consult a psychologist or family doctor

Schools

- Screen students for language difficulties, especially phonemic awareness skills
- Provide engaging, systematic, and explicit reading instruction in all areas of literacy development (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, spelling, and writing)
- Provide intensive, highly structured interventions for struggling learners
- Monitor progress and review data
- Involve parents and offer suggestions
- Allow extra time and a quiet work area
- Use recorded texts

"Remember that stars are not born in most areas but are made after lots of practice and hard work." (S. Shaywitz)

Online Resources

Parents and Educators:

- www.interdys.org/ (great fact sheets)
- www.fcrr.org/ (super website)
- www.ldonline.org/indepth/reading
- www.readingrockets.org/article/c63/
- www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/dyslexia/dyslexia.htm
- www.schwablearning.org/articles.aspx?r=718 (interview with Sally Shaywitz)
- www.lidaamerica.org/
- www.readingrockets.org/article/69?theme=print

Educators and Professionals

- www.fcrr.org/Curriculum/studentCenterActivities.htm (300+ student activities)
- www.fcrr.org/TechnicalReports/Dyslexia_Technical_Assistance_Paper-Final.pdf
- www.reading.uoregon.edu/
- www.nasponline.org/resources/reading/index.aspx

Students:

- www.kidshealth.org/kid/health_problems/learning_problem/dyslexia.html
- www.schwablearning.org/articles.aspx?r=529 (boy's journal entries on dyslexia)
- www.dyslexia.com/qafame.htm (famous people with dyslexia)
- www.sparktop.org/explore/brainpop.html

Book/Reading List

- Shaywitz, S. (2003). *Overcoming Dyslexia*.
- www.fcrr.org/science/scienceRecommendedReading.htm (skill specific reading lists)

Provided by:
**South Dakota Association
of School Psychologists**
www.usd.edu/sdasp/

Understanding Dyslexia



Answers to Questions Commonly Asked by Parents

What is dyslexia?

What are the warning signs?

My child can't read; now what?

When should you evaluate?

Who should evaluate?

What do you evaluate?

My child has dyslexia; now what?

What can parents/schools do?

Provided by:

**South Dakota Association
of School Psychologists**

