

## Empowering Parents for Support of Their Children with Dyslexia

### Manual for parents

Dear parents,

When we proposed a project entitled Empowering Parents of Children with Dyslexia, we thought about you. We know it is sometimes very difficult to explain to others what your child with dyslexia needs. Dyslexia cannot be seen and it only manifests on certain occasions. However, these occasions may sometimes be rather unexpected and people who have never experienced dyslexia are sometimes a bit suspicious about its existence. They tend to think it is just an excuse for not being able to do something or even for being lazy or stupid. However, the research has proven what dyslexia is without any doubt. Furthermore, you know your child, you know his/her strengths and weaknesses, you want to help him/her and you want to do your best to prevent him/her from failing. Even though dyslexia complicates learning, it is important to stay self-confident about one's specific learning abilities. There are many people with dyslexia who have studied and study universities, many successful people with dyslexia who have created and invented different things and projects. What they have in common is their belief they can reach what they want despite dyslexia. And this belief came from their experience at school and at home. They certainly had people around who encouraged them, who loved them and showed them they could achieve whatever they wanted.

But sometimes you just miss the right words to tell others (teachers, relatives, siblings etc.) what dyslexia is and what your child needs. This is the reason why we created this manual. It briefly explains what dyslexia is and how we can cope with it. It also tells you what you may require from school, what our national legislation tells about students with dyslexia, what can help your child with better reading and schoolwork and also how to deal with your child's emotions as well as your own feelings. We attempted to write the chapters in a way they would give you power to talk about your child's dyslexia, to request his/her rights in getting quality education and to support him/her in various interactions with others.

Here are some basic rules which are worth keeping in mind when advocating for your child. They refer to topics which are further elaborated in the following chapters.

#### Parents' advocacy for their children with dyslexia – seven tenets

1. Make sure that your child's reading and/or writing difficulties are acknowledged at school and that there is help scheme in place.
2. Make paper trail – submit written applications to school with your requests and get written responses from school.
3. Get your child's individual education plan (IEP) in a written form. Insist that you and your child are involved in its development.
4. Ask school direct questions about your child's progress in reading and track how effective remediation is.



5. Do the same with the accommodations (various adjustments in all subjects for more effective instruction) – talk to school at least twice a year to see if they are working.
6. Establish who is the key/responsible person at school for implementation of your child's IEP / support (in case there is no IEP).
7. Encourage your child to advocate for himself, e.g., using PC at all times for written class work and getting extra time on tests.

## **Preface from Eric Tridas, M.D. - Past President, International Dyslexia Association**

Dyslexia is the most common learning disability affecting 5 – 10 percent of the world population. It is a neurological disorder that affects a person’s ability to read and write, in spite of being intelligent and having had appropriate instruction.

Reading and writing are not natural biological functions. The human brain is designed to discriminate speech from noise and to label what we see. We borrow these neurological skills in order to learn to read and write. When these brain functions do not develop as expected, the person will usually experience problems with reading and writing.

School systems all over the world are designed to fulfill three basic goals: literacy, general education and preparation for a trade or higher education. That is why children are taught first to read, write and compute (add, subtract and multiply). Subsequently, they learn to apply those skills and acquire further knowledge. The first three or four years of a child’s education are designed to teach them basic literacy skills. At that point in their education the students are expected to have mastered these skills to an automatic level. That is, they can read rapidly, accurately and with good comprehension; can communicate complete thoughts in writing and will have memorized basic facts of addition, subtraction and multiplication. These first few early elementary school years are the only time in a child’s life where the educational experience is primarily designed to teach reading, writing and arithmetic. These are essential skills for their future education and survival in our modern world.

Once the students acquire these basic skills, the focus of instruction changes to their application. That is, they will read to learn rather than learn to read. They will write to communicate so that others can learn what they are thinking and feeling even in their absence. Students will also apply basic computational skills to solve problems. This is why it is so critical to ensure that children at risk for reading and other learning challenges are identified and provided with evidence based instruction as early as possible.

This publication will provide parents with information about dyslexia, its causes and treatment. It also describes existing special education laws in four European countries that ensure the provision of appropriate, evidence based educational services for students identified as having a specific learning disorder such as dyslexia. I believe that this is a wonderful resource that will help empower parents to support their children with dyslexia and other special learning needs.

**Eric Tridas, M.D.**

**Past President, International Dyslexia Association**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION - WHAT IS DYSLEXIA

Do you remember when you were told your child has dyslexia? Maybe you have just been told this by a specialist. Loads of questions probably came into your mind:

- ✗ What does it mean?
- ✗ What is the child able to do and what is he/she not?
- ✗ How can we as parents help him/her?
- ✗ How will I explain to our relatives what the problem is? Will they understand and accept it?
- ✗ How will my child cope at school? Will his/her teachers accept his/her special needs?
- ✗ Who can help us?
- ✗ Is there any cure for dyslexia?
- ✗ What will my child's school career be like? Will he/she fail? Will he/she be able to pass all levels of education? Will he/she be able to study in a college?
- ✗ ... and more and more

This booklet attempts to give you answers to these questions (at least to some of them). As we are parents, we understand that you play a crucial role in your child's life. When he/she faces troubles, you become even more important. Even though most often the consequences of dyslexia are connected with school, you have to be able to stand up for your child. This means that you need to understand what your child's troubles are and also how the child and his/her environment may overcome these troubles. It is not always easy and it is a life-long process. However, the more you can support your child the more likely it is that your child will happily complete his/her schooling. Imagine - your son or daughter spends much of his/her day at school. School is a significant part of his/her life and he/she deserves to succeed and be motivated and enjoy at least some parts of his/her education!

The aim of this Manual is to empower you to explain to others what problems your child faces. You do not have to be a specialist on dyslexia but you are a specialist on your child and you have the right to require the best for him/her. Let's start from the beginning. First let's see what dyslexia is and how you as parents can explain to others what problems your child has.

Here is an **official definition of dyslexia** that was published by International Dyslexia Association (IDA) at the beginning of this millennium:

*„Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with accurate and / or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”*

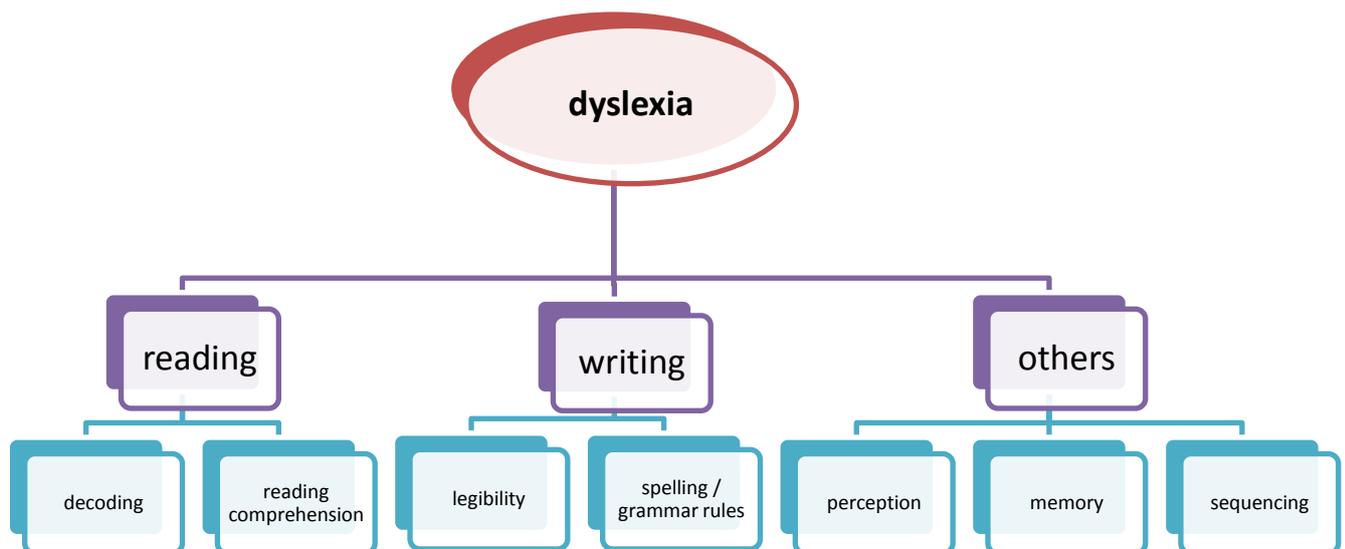
However, we also like to use a **non-formal definition of dyslexia**, which prevents labelling and maybe gives some ideas how to work with the child. This is:

*“People with dyslexia are people who use different ways to acquire the information that they need to learn.”*

This means that your son or daughter can learn to read and write. He/she has talents and weaknesses as other people have. He/she can reach the same achievements in many areas of his/her school career.

The thing we need to focus on is finding appropriate ways how the child (and also an adolescent and an adult) can most effectively learn reading and writing. This often means that your child will have to spend more time on acquiring these and other skills. He/she will have to practice some areas of learning more frequently. However, everything depends on the way learning is provided to a child. If we only force your child with dyslexia to repeat his/her schoolwork in the most traditional way, he/she may not learn much despite a vast amount of time devoted to studying. Furthermore, he/she is likely to become desperate, to lose motivation, and his/her talents will be wasted. Thus, it is very important to think about how your own child learns and to help him/her to learn independently. We cannot just rely on approaches which have been used in our education for years. It may work with others but not all the approaches work now! Basically, information in reading and writing mode is not the most suitable for people with dyslexia.

What are the **most common areas of problems** affected by dyslexia?



Picture 1 - Areas of difficulties in dyslexia<sup>1</sup>

**Each individual with dyslexia has a specific profile of strengths and weaknesses.** Even the most common symptoms of dyslexia may differ in their intensity and manifestation (e.g. some people with dyslexia are not able to read at all, while others may read rather fluently but their comprehension is very poor, and another group of such people may read very slowly with terrible difficulties and many mistakes but they understand the meaning of a text very well). The symptoms also change with age - what can be a big issue at the beginning of schooling can become pretty marginal later and vice versa. More-

<sup>1</sup> Demonet, Taylor, & Chaix, 2004; Nicolson, & Fawcett, 2008; Reid, 2003; Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling, & Scanlon, 2004.



over, the intensity of symptoms will certainly be less severe after several years of training. However, proper accommodation at school and at home is still needed.

Apart from reading and writing dyslexia is sometimes associated with some other areas of cognitive functions (as the picture shows). What are the **problems connected with dyslexia**?

- ✓ perception includes proper processing and **phonological awareness**<sup>2</sup> which is generally considered to be the cause of dyslexia; you might see these problems in your child (all these together form what is called phonological awareness):
  - rhyming difficulties
  - awareness of phonemes in words
  - syllabification (i.e. identifying syllables in words)
  - segmenting words into phonemes
  - blending phonemes into words
  - auditory discrimination (i.e. differentiation of similar words)
  - phonological manipulation (i.e. manipulating with phonemes in words)
  - rapid automatized naming (i.e. fast retrieval of appropriate names for presented stimuli)
- ✓ in more transparent orthographies<sup>3</sup> (i.e. languages in which written text is always read in the same way, there are clear rules how to read letters and words - e.g. Italian, Czech, German and Latvian) specialist sometimes also speak about affected visual perception<sup>4</sup>; it involves difficulties in the following areas:
  - visual discrimination (i.e. differentiation among similar stimuli such as similar letters and signs)
  - visual analysis (i.e. segmenting a whole into parts)
  - perception of the so called gestalts (i.e. wholes)
  - perception of figure and background (i.e. what is main part of a picture, what is less relevant)
- ✓ **memory** can be characterized from different points of view but the most frequently affected kinds of memory are short-term memory and working memory<sup>5</sup>:
  - **short-term memory** is necessary to process visual and auditory information for a short time (e.g. to remember what page one is supposed to open a book on, to remember a phone number until one dials it, to remember what to write down into a notebook after reading it on a blackboard); once a short-term memory does not work properly, information cannot be even stored in a long-term memory - this means learning takes more time and is more difficult when we only rely on rote-memorization

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony, Lonigan, Driscoll, Philips, & Burgess, 2003; Snowling, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Brunswick, McDougall, & de Mornay Davies, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Pickering, 2001; Stein, 2001; Stein, & Kapoula, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Baddeley, 2007; Beneventi, Tønnessen, Erslund, & Hugdahl, 2010; Gathercole, & Holme, 2014; Mather, & Wendling, 2012; Menghini, Finzi, Caresimo, & Vicari, 2012; Palmer, 2012.



- **working memory** combines information stored in short-term memory and retrieved from long-term memory when one has to solve a certain problem (e.g. math calculations without using pen and paper, writing notes at school, writing an essay)
- ✓ **sequencing**<sup>6</sup> means to work in accordance with a certain sequence, to follow particular steps when solving a problem; individuals with dyslexia sometimes face troubles strictly following such rules (they sometimes know the result but they do not know how they have reached it and they are not able to explain this to others); it can also be connected with poor understanding of temporal relationships

These are various areas and problems that are sometimes associated with dyslexia, but it is important to remember that the core problem is a problem of reading.

What are some **other important facts** about dyslexia<sup>7</sup>?

- ✗ It is innate.
- ✗ It is a life-long issue.
- ✗ It is genetic - it is hereditary.
- ✗ The problems that it causes can be reduced and/or moderated by continuous work and appropriate reading remediation and intervention which usually last for most of your son/daughter's school career. There is no cure for dyslexia.
- ✗ It is connected with language skills and verbal abilities - some people with dyslexia may have troubles in these areas.
- ✗ The statistics say there are approx. 5-10 per cent of people with dyslexia in population.
- ✗ Boys are said to have dyslexia more often than girls, but girls are less likely (than expected) to be referred for help.
- ✗ When children are not helped appropriately, they may develop the so called secondary symptoms, i.e. low self-esteem, low self-concept, low self-consciousness – their personality may get affected by continuous problems at school, by negative feedback and by their helplessness!

However, dyslexia is also linked with some **“positives”**<sup>8</sup>. People with dyslexia are said to be:

- ☺ more creative
- ☺ good at visualisation
- ☺ good at holistic thinking
- ☺ they sometimes say dyslexia gave them stamina and they learned to be hard-working to reach their goals

Do you know some famous and successful people with dyslexia?

- » Orlando Bloom (actor)

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<sup>6</sup> Reid, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Demonet, Taylor, & Chaix, 2004; Reid, 2003; Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling, & Scanlon, 2004.

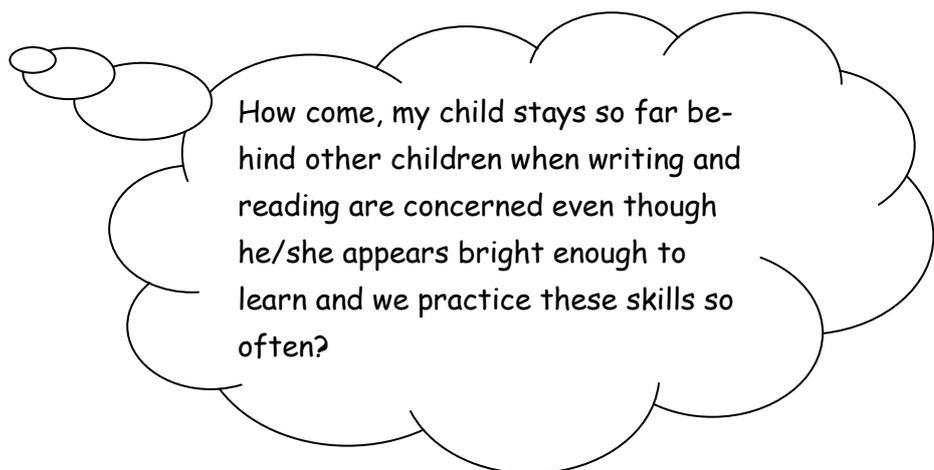
<sup>8</sup> Everatt, Steffert, & Smythe, 1999.

- » Tom Cruise (actor)
- » Whoopi Goldberg (actor)
- » Keanu Reeves (actor)
- » Robin Williams (actor)
- » Pablo Picasso (artist)
- » Auguste Rodin (artist)
- » Andy Warhol (artist)
- » Muhammad Ali (boxer)
- » Magic Johnson (athlete)
- » Henry Ford (inventor and businessman)
- » William Hewlett (entrepreneur)
- » Winston Churchill (Prime Minister of the UK)
- » John F. Kennedy (President of the USA)
- » Nelson Rockefeller (Governor and Vice President of the USA)
- » Woodrow Wilson (President of the USA)
- » Agatha Christie (mystery writer)
- » Francis Scott Fitzgerald (author)
- » Alexander Graham Bell (entrepreneur)
- » Thomas Edison (inventor)
- » John Lennon (musician – member of the Beatles)
- » ... and your child

As a parent, it is likely that you were the first to see that your child faces some troubles. You may have not understood what the problems were but you were probably aware that your child's abilities and skills, his/her enthusiasm for learning new things and his/her school results and a level of reading and writing skills just didn't seem to match.

Despite the fact you are not a professional in the area of education and psychology, you are an expert in your child's

life and development. Here are some hints for **what to notice in your child's behaviour**<sup>9</sup>.



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<sup>9</sup> Mather, & Wendling, 2012.

- ✓ **indicators (risk factors) at preschool age:**
  - difficulties to learn to talk
  - difficulties to learn proper pronunciation of certain sounds and/or words
  - use of inappropriate grammar forms when talking
  - problems in learning poems / in rhyming
  - difficulties to remember information
  - less interest in letters and/or numbers
  - not much interest in school work
- ✓ **indicators (risk factors) at school:**
  - difficulties to learn to read despite significant and extended work at school and at home
  - difficulties to remember names of letters
  - difficulties to divide a word into syllables
  - difficulties to identify letters in words (e.g. first and last letters of certain words, segmentation of words into letters, and blending letters into words)
  - difficulties to create rhymes
  - difficulties to hear a difference between similar words and/or syllables
  - difficulties to learn to write despite intensive work at school and at home
  - difficulties to remember what certain letters look like
  - difficulties to apply grammar rules
  - not very neat handwriting
  - difficulties to remember lists of words and other information, instructions, poems etc. (even though the child remembers very well when a story is told him/her or when he/she sees something etc.)
  - difficulties in spatial orientation and temporal relations
  - making mistakes such as confusion of similar words and/or letters when reading and writing

If you observe any of these, it does not mean your child definitely has dyslexia. It only means you should be more cautious, support your child and think about his schoolwork more frequently. If the difficulties appear in various combinations and the child cannot get rid of them despite hard work at school and at home, then it is time to discuss the problems with a specialist.

## 2. LEGISLATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

A child with dyslexia is considered to be a child with special educational needs (SEN). Once the child starts attending school, his/her special needs have to be treated in accordance with **School Law no. 561/2004** (paragraph no. 16). The information from the School Law is further elaborated in Regulations published by The Ministry of education. The regulations connected with special educational needs are:

- ➔ The regulation no. 72/2005 (on counselling services)
- ➔ The regulation no. 73/2005 (on education of students with SEN)
- ➔ The regulation no. 116/2011 (modifies regulation no. 72/2005)
- ➔ The regulation no. 147/2011 (modifies regulation no. 73/2005)

### Counselling

Pupils and students with dyslexia are treated in **educational - psychological counselling centres**. Each school comes under the authority of one particular centre. If necessary, ask for contact information your child's teacher and/or a school counsellor (each school has at least one school counsellor who is in charge of students with SEN - see website of your child's school).

If you are not satisfied with services of your counselling centre, you are entitled to ask for services at another centre. It may take time before the appointment is held as they have their own clients from their schools. However, they are obliged to offer you help as well.

You can also visit a private practice of a speech therapist, a special educator, a psychologist and/or you can cooperate with some non-governmental institutions which focus on children with dyslexia. However, keep in mind that state educational - psychological centres are the only institutions which can legally back up an individual educational plan for your child at school.

### Accommodations

In accordance with the current legislation, a student with dyslexia (i.e. a child in a kindergarten, a pupil at elementary school, a student at secondary school) is entitled to certain accommodations of his/her school work.

There are currently two types of accommodations:

- ➔ **compensatory accommodations**
  - these are especially for students with less severe difficulties
  - they can be carried out within school on the basis of teachers' assessment, no official document from a counselling centre is needed
  - they should be applied immediately when a child starts having some problems - while teachers wait for an assessment report and recommendations from a counselling centre, they can already integrate various compensatory accommodations into child's schoolwork to help him/her as much as possible
- ➔ **supporting accommodations**
  - these are implemented on the basis of state counselling centre reports
  - they are usually combined with compensatory accommodations



- they are used for students with more severe difficulties
- school may ask for financial support once these are implemented (the money can be used to buy different teaching aids and tools for students with SEN and/or to pay for extra services and/or extra classes offered to these students by school special educators and/or teachers who are qualified to work with children with dyslexia)

### Individual Education Plan (IEP)

When a child is assessed at the counselling centre and if his/her difficulties are considered rather severe, he/she is entitled to get an IEP. The centre prepares a **special document** on this issue which includes a list of recommended approaches, a list of recommended teaching tools and materials for a particular child, and also recommendation of extra services and classes which a school should organize for the child. The whole procedure is called integration of a child with SEN.

However, **parents have to ask the headmaster** of the school to integrate their child and to have an IEP done for him/her. The headmaster has the right to decide whether the child will be integrated or not. It is normal to follow counselling centre recommendation and integrate the child. One of the most common reasons why the headmaster rejects parents' request is that there are already five students integrated in child's class and the law says there cannot be more students integrated in one class. Then the headmaster and parents have to negotiate to find an appropriate solution to such situation. No child may be left behind just because of formal matters! In case the headmaster rejects the integration and is not willing to solve the situation, do ask the counselling centre for help. In certain cases the only feasible solution can be a change of school.

After the integration is accepted by the headmaster, teachers are supposed to **create an IEP** for your child. An ideal situation is when all parties (i.e. teachers, parents, and the child) participate in the process of IEP creation. The document should include teaching strategies and/or accommodations in a classroom, compensatory aids, examination and evaluation strategies, each subject outcomes expected in a particular school year, „duties“ of teachers, parents, students, extra remediation approaches, a specialist in charge. The IEP has to be created no later than a month after the integration was accepted and all teachers should follow it.

The IEP should be a **living document** which is often used and referred to by teachers as well as parents. It should be a **helpful resource** to help a student with SEN!

## 2. LEGISLATION IN ESTONIA

The total range of special educational needs (SEN) is described in Elementary Schools and Secondary schools Law (BSGL) which has been applied since 2010 and was modified in 2013. Dyslexia/ specific reading difficulties (SRD) are implicitly included in „learning difficulties“ in the BSGL. No more specifications are provided in the context of „learning difficulties“. Dyslexia is not articulated explicitly.

A three-level supporting system is nationally established to manage SEN problems in the educational area:

1. school level – SEN students get support in their school using school resources and specialists
2. regional level – counsellors and specialists from regional centres are included into the supporting process
3. additional support level – additional resources and specialists outside the level I and II are included, mostly from Tallinn University and Tartu University

BSGL states that every local authority (LA) in Estonia is responsible for SEN and must provide special support to every student with SEN, including those with reading difficulties. Every school is required to provide accommodations within the curriculum, learning methods and/or IEP according to student's SEN and in cooperation with specialists (special teacher, psychologist, social educator or social worker). A lot of schools, but not all, provide a special teacher and speech therapist services. The second level counselling centres work in every county. Educational institutions, i.e. schools and counselling centres, establish a support system, whose main aims are: early identification and implementation of supportive services/learning support.

**BSGL describes an SEN student and main approaches to identify SEN.** SEN students are considered students with giftedness, learning difficulties, health conditions, disabilities, emotional and behavioural differences, long-term absence from the learning process, those with Estonian as their second language, who all require accommodations within *the* curricula, learning process, length of learning, environment (tools, rooms, language, and support specialists) and/or learning outcomes. The main pedagogical-psychological approaches in identifying SEN are following: observations in different situations, collecting data about previous educational and home environment, medical and speech therapist assessment.

**The main principles and learning support for SEN students** are based on an idea of inclusive education which states the every child has a right to learn in the school closest to his/her home. SEN students learning process is stated in accordance with the school curriculum. School principals designate a coordinating person (SENCO) who organises cooperation between school managements, teachers, support team and parents in order to assess and support SEN student learning.

**Classes and groups for SEN students** can be created in every school. Main structure to meet students' needs is remedial learning/ learning support groups with maximum 6 students.

**Individual Educational Plan (IEP) as an option to support SEN students learning is also provided.** The IEP consists of school recommendations to support SEN student learning and development. The IEP can

be written in every subject or for a single special subject for every student. Counselling commission advice to support SEN is described in the IEP. This advice is recommended to teachers and parents.

**The Ministry of Education and Research regulates (regulation 3.06.2012) additional conditions for elementary school final examinations.** These conditions are often used as measures to support the graduation process for SEN students. Additional conditions are:

- 1) **extra time** up to 15 min per one hour (60 min)
- 2) **extra room**
- 3) **extra break** up to 10 min per one hour (60 min)
- 4) exam questions and text **oral presentation** for students with visual impairment or specific reading difficulties
- 5) use of **dictionaries, reviews of formulas** etc. for students with learning difficulties
- 6) **easy language instructions, detailed descriptions, orally presented instructions** for students with learning difficulties
- 7) **differentiated assessment** in mother tongue for students with specific writing difficulties

The newly reformed system of regional counselling centres was due to be in force in September 2014.

#### **DREAMS AND REALITY in legislation**

The freshly formulated BSGL (applied in 2010, and modified in 2013) states a list of SEN students, main ideas and organisation for remedial/supportive teaching. The inclusive educational approach is accepted and regulated at state level. The system of learning support is elaborated *de jure* and implemented according to the local situation and current options in schools. Learning support for SEN students is not available in every school at an appropriate level.

Several reasons impede applying BSGL in all specifications. Lack of resources becomes evident in the following areas:

- a) **staff:** teachers, teacher assistants, special team members are often missing in schools;
- b) **teacher education, pre-service and in-service preparation** do not address special needs topics sufficiently;
- c) **methodological tools and equipment** need to be developed, shared and practised in daily routine;
- d) **common knowledge, parental involvement** needs improvement and modernisation.



## 2. LEGISLATION IN ITALY

Italy has a long time experience with school inclusion of children with difficulties, starting from 1992, with law no. 104/92, which represented a milestone in this field. The law emphasizes how important the school, especially the teacher, is in pursuing the inclusion of the pupil facing learning problems.

The law no. 104/92 aims to give practical answers to different dimensions of the disability, i.e. social, working and educational aspects.

During the twenty years of application of this law a deep inclusive culture has risen in the Italian society. Thanks to awareness raising actions, to new scientific studies and a new educational culture the legislator has had the capability to give an organic and homogeneous answer to pupils with learning problems.

This answer has been given through the first national law on dyslexia, the Law no. 170/2010 “Rules on Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) in the school context”, the legal framework according to which the Regional Laws have to be developed.

The law is composed of 9 articles; the most important are:

- Article 1 that defines different kinds of SpLD (dyslexia, dysorthographia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia), keeping them separated by disabilities (as defined by law 104/92).
- Article 2 that is about the rights of the pupils affected by SpLD; he/she has the right to be supported by specific learning methodologies and tools, while the cooperation among school, family and public health services is recommended. Furthermore, the need of teachers training is underlined, together with awareness raising actions towards family in order to ensure that children with dyslexia are empowered to reach their full potential.
- Article 3 emphasizes the role of the school in the identification of the problem and prompt information to a family that will therefore feel the responsibility to arrange appropriate assessment procedures for the child in a public health service.
- Article 5 is about the rights for children with SpLD to use compensatory tools at schools; they are generally described in the same article.
- Article 6 establishes that family members of a child with SpLD can benefit from flexible working time (but only in a primary school).
- Article 7 is about the assessment and prevention, to be arranged together with the Department of Health.

The national law has been an important step to support students with dyslexia, mainly because of the involvement of the three subjects – school, family and public health service – it places pupils at the centre of the process that will lead them to achieve their full potential in education, training and employment. They will therefore become citizens fully included in the society.

The law considers the SpLD as a condition that can be changed through remediation and the use of specific educational tools.

## 2. LEGISLATION IN LATVIA

The term dyslexia is very little mentioned and thus obscure in the legislation. Dyslexia is listed in the regulations about educational medical commissions that issue a certificate that a student has a special need. This commission does not give a precise diagnosis, though, but only assigns a code of one out of eight special educational programs. Dyslexia is listed in two special education programs – in learning disability and language impairment programs. It is not clear how the first dyslexia is different from the second one.

Those students with dyslexia are placed in the three speech therapy special schools or special language impairment programs (20 special classes out of 800 schools) receive the same education as students with 19 other diagnoses that are clustered in this program. As a result of this, they do not receive individualized, specific and intensive reading instruction. Accommodation is very scarce – the only accommodation used in most schools is extra time for work. ICT and assistive technologies are not practically used – only in separate cases if parents buy a student a computer. Though, many general education students in grades 1-4 attend extra speech therapy classes (1-2 times per week) to improve their speech and mainly writing skills.

During high stake tests and exams a ruler with a hole and reminder cards are offered as assistive tools. Not a single student in general secondary education receives any educational and/or ICT help because of his/her dyslexia or dysgraphia.



### 3. HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT HIS/HER DYSLEXIA

It is likely that your child is the first one to know that he/she cannot read, spell and write as well as other students in his/her class. He/she may not know the word dyslexia but he/she is certainly aware of the fact that something is wrong.

Lexi Walters Wright is an USA author who has shared **advice on how to speak with your child** about dyslexia for the website *Understood* to inform parents about SpLD's and attention issues ([www.understood.org](http://www.understood.org))<sup>10</sup>:

1. Find a peaceful, pleasant moment (not when your child is stressed over his/her schoolwork). Reflect with your child that he/she is doing well at school.
2. Say what dyslexia is. It is a difficulty to learn to read and many people have it. Your child is not alone in that. Dyslexia has nothing to do with general intelligence – with appropriate work and proper support your child can do anything he/she wants in his/her life.
3. Use precise language – once your child's difficulties are given a specific name, they will become more manageable. Informing your child about his/her dyslexia must be the beginning of getting structured help at school – extra reading lessons and accommodation that will be specified in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Once we know the word dyslexia, let's use it for our benefit!
4. Students with dyslexia may worry that their teachers (will) think that they are just not trying hard enough. Tell your child that now there are many ways teachers can help students with reading difficulties to succeed. Tell your child that he/she will be involved in developing his/her IEP and his/her input and thought will be listened to.
5. Tell your child that you will support him always and everywhere – at home, at school and community.
6. As a child with dyslexia usually gets more attention from his/her parents than his/her siblings, tell your child that you do for him/her what you would do for his/her brothers or sisters if needed. Tell him/her that his siblings understand and know that.
7. Let your child know that it is up to him/her to decide how much to talk about his/her dyslexia with people from outside school. Tell him/her that it is enough to say that he/she has to learn a bit differently to read and it is not that he/she cannot do that (at all).
8. Reassure your child about the future. Tell him/her that he/she will be able to achieve his/her goals in life with hard work and determination. Find out about your child's plans after high school – college, career, adult life. Assure him/her that his/her weaker reading and writing skills will not stop his/her dreams in life.

Even though in some countries dyslexia is still demonized and people with it are stigmatized, there is no other way to minimize the negative stereotypes but defeating them with clear and precise information. It is important to show that you do not think your child is anything less because of his/her dyslexia. Your child is not defined just by his/her dyslexia - it is only a part of his/her personality, abilities, and interests. The sooner your child understands that, the better he/she will become an advocate for himself/herself in various educational and life situations.

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<sup>10</sup> Wright, 2014.



### **How to talk to your family members about your child's dyslexia**

Parents should tell family members about their child's dyslexia as it becomes obvious that activities involving reading and writing are difficult for the child. Use precise language when talking about dyslexia – it will make it clear to family what you understand by it and minimize the stigma of dyslexia – once you treat it as an integral but not defining part of your child's life, others should look at it that way too.

### **How to talk to your child's teachers about his/her dyslexia**

Talking to your child's teachers at school can be a reciprocal process – they may initiate this conversation as they might detect your child's dyslexia sooner than you as a parent will (which would be even more logical in cases when dyslexia only becomes evident when the children start reading and writing at school).

Talking to your child's teachers can have at least three forms:

- You notice that your child is struggling with reading and writing at home and has other symptoms of dyslexia. You initiate a conversation with your child's teachers and you tell them about what you have noticed and ask for their observations and knowledge on these issues. If the teachers agree with or confirm what you see, proceed with deciding how to help your child at school in a coordinated way.
- Your child's teachers inform you about signs and symptoms of dyslexia they see in your child. Ask what the observations, symptoms and proof of the possible reading problems are. Ask the teachers if they have done any testing and/or your child's mistakes (in reading and writing) analyses. If so, ask for a written summary of their results. Ask for further referral for testing and intervention for improving reading.
- If you already know your child has dyslexia (previous testing, changing from a school where dyslexia has been recognised to a new one, etc.) inform your child's teachers and school administrators (counsellors) immediately and ask for a written individual education plan.

## 4. WHAT HELPS IN SCHOOL

### A) When doing homework and preparing for school

Homework is a major part of a school life. There are many ways to make homework easier and most of them are important for both children who have dyslexia and those who don't.

The main goal of homework is to practise or examine in depth a topic already reviewed at school. If the assignments are too difficult and/or too long, homework becomes a challenge for both the child with dyslexia and his/her family. Certain accommodations, tools, techniques and structures may help to make homework manageable.

The first step is to inform a teacher when the homework is too difficult and takes up too much time. It is always necessary to write in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) what the existing agreements between family and teachers are, i.e.:

- ✦ the means used by teachers to assign homework (simplified photocopies, digital documents, recorded documents, etc.),
- ✦ the possibility of using different tools to present exercises to students (informatics, power point presentation, mind maps, fill in exercises, etc.);
- ✦ the quantity of homework assigned.

Here are some specific tips for parents helping their children when doing homework.

#### 1. Reading

- ✦ **Digital texts.** Considering the fact that a child with dyslexia finds even reading of simple texts very hard, a good solution is to use existing digital books or scan assigned texts, so that he/she may be able to “read them by using ears” – thanks to the computer and text- to-speech software.
- ✦ **Reading out loud.** If digital tools are not available, a parent may read out loud the necessary materials.
- ✦ **Using structured texts.** The use of structured texts (bold character, bullets, colours, pictures) represents a big help for the child to understand the content of a book with a small effort. He/she will be able to identify easily the main elements of a text and studying will become simpler.
- ✦ **Simplified texts.** Simplification is available on a word, a sentence and a text level. Using simplified texts enables a child to go through the text and comprehend the content in a less laborious way.

#### 2. Writing



- ⤴ **Graphic organizers.** Use graphic organizers (mind-maps, charts, diagrams, outlines, etc.) to support the child to develop ideas and create a writing plan.
- ⤴ **Spell checker.** It corrects spelling mistakes in PC texts.
- ⤴ **Use a computer.** Especially in cases of severe writing difficulties, the use of a computer equipped with a word processing programme and a spellchecker will help. Text-to-speech software would be even better.
- ⤴ **Slow down.** It is better to encourage the child to produce good work instead of getting it done quickly.

### 3. Organizing the “homework time”

- ⤴ **Routine.** It is useful to programme a daily routine in the execution of homework. A written plan hanging near the desk helps.
- ⤴ **Plan.** You could build, together with your child, a grid containing details of various subjects (possibly represented with symbols that facilitate information storage) and their distribution during a week. The child could also be encouraged to create forms, diagrams, maps that can help as a support.
- ⤴ **Organizing materials.** The materials should then be divided by subject matters, and possibly organized in a container ring; using different colours for every subject will also help a lot.
- ⤴ **Environment.** The place where you study should be quiet, with enough work space and all the supplies (pencils, maps, computer, digital dictionaries, multimedia encyclopaedias, internet, etc...) within reach.
- ⤴ **Time management.** It is very important to break up the work into manageable chunks that can be executed in a reasonable time and take time for breaks. A child with dyslexia often gets discouraged if the amount of homework is excessive.
- ⤴ **Instructions.** If the student does not write the assigned tasks in the diary accurately, you should ask for help his/her classmates or ask the teacher to give written directions. If your school uses an electronic diary programme, make sure that your child understands it.
- ⤴ **Communication with teachers.** It is always appropriate to intensify the relationships between teachers and parents of pupils and students with dyslexia in order to increase the synergy of action. It is best to be non-confrontational, but always have concrete examples of problems or issues when you meet with your child’s teacher(s).
- ⤴ **Feedback.** When a child satisfactorily completes his/her homework, it is very important to be rewarding and appreciate the work done. Give specific feedback about what he/she has done well. When he/she makes mistakes, instead of pointing to errors, you should discuss with him/her the strategies that helped him to be successful and brainstorm on ways to overcome or bypass difficulties.



- ⤴ **Free time.** Studying should not absorb all the time; it is necessary to leave enough time for fun activities (sports, friends, etc.).

## B) When learning at school

Parents of children who have dyslexia should ask the school and teachers to prepare an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for their children.

- ⤴ **The Plan.** IEP is a document which must be written by teachers, after they have talked with both the specialists who follow the student and their parents. The purpose of this document is to formalize what strategies and tools the school intends to put in place in order to make sure that your son/daughter learns effectively, and in a way that doesn't change the content of the school programme.
- ⤴ **Tools.** The school should make sure that your son/daughter has a computer to use, possibly within the classroom. The PC could either be in the property of the school or in the property of the child. The teachers should prepare alternative learning tools for different subjects, such as concept maps, diagrams, etc. The teachers should encourage your son/daughter to use them in school and at home.
- ⤴ **Accommodations.** Your son/daughter should have compensatory aids lectures and exams and should not be: forced to read aloud in class, given surprise exams, forced to memorize multiplication tables, etc. He/she should be allowed extra time for assignments in school and in the final exams of each term. The same accommodations must be provided for all the final exams.

## C) Compensatory tools

Compensatory tools are those tools that can help your child to "compensate" for his/her difficulties. Both high and low-tech instruments are useful in overcoming the difficulties and in enhancing skills and his/her the potential.

When used in an effective and individualized way, they can help your child become an autonomous learner. Some of them are:

- » Concept maps
- » Mind Maps
- » Multiplication tables
- » Recorder
- » Calculator
- » Diagrams and tables (for example, for grammar rules or geometry)
- » Text-to-speech software
- » Speech-to-text software
- » Audio-books
- » Learning to type software and/or online programmes

#### D) ICT tools suitable for people with dyslexia

New technologies are becoming more important and can really help. Technological tools, indeed, simplify a task by carrying out a series of automatic operations that appear complicated to a student with dyslexia.

The use of computers should not, however, become a marker of difference (a stigma) but it must be a working tool both at an individual and a group level. In particular, we suggest<sup>11</sup>:

ICT TOOL	TOOL DESCRIPTION
Word processor	Text editor with a spell checker and text-to-speech software
Text-to-speech / Digital books/ Multimedia dictionary and en- cyclopaedia	Allows listening to a digital text imported into one's computer
Scanner/OCR (Optical Character Recognition)	Software that translates a scanned image into a text
Speech recognizer	Through a microphone, this software turns words into a digital text
Internet	It is a great resource of accessible materials; you can read the contents through text-to-speech

<sup>11</sup> The following ICT tools are suggested on the basis of the Italian Law on dyslexia, the N. 170/2010, "Rules on Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) in the school context"- art. 5.

## 5. READING INSTRUCTION

### Introduction

When your son/daughter starts school he/she learns to read. Later, reading is not the subject of learning but the means – we use reading to learn. So, it is important for parents to understand that reading and learning to read are not natural or developmental events. Learning to read is a process and it involves a child mastering two major skills – language development and decoding of text. If one of these two things is lacking, then the person cannot learn to read. Luckily, very few people have such severe problems with this that they cannot learn to read.

This section of our manual discusses what good reading instruction is and how to find out if your child's school is using good methods to teach reading. It goes on to explain how you could recognize that your child is struggling to learn to read. Finally, this chapter explains evidence based reading remediation for children who are struggling and talks about how you can work with your child's teacher to assure that your child gets appropriate remediation – extra individualized reading instruction tailored specifically for your child.

By the time you finish reading this section you will understand better how to recognize what services or assistance your child is getting and how to be an advocate for your child to get the most appropriate ones.

### Reading Instruction

We are lucky today that we have a very good understanding of how to teach reading. This comes from a large body of very good research that has been done in alphabetic languages such as Estonian, Latvian, Italian, English and many other languages that are based on a letter-sound connection.

Alphabetic languages are ones that use symbols called letters to represent the sounds of language. If your son or daughter understands language, he/she can learn to read by learning to see the relationships (specific to your language) between letters and sounds.

Research done by Tunmer and Hoover in 1992 considered how reading is acquired and suggested the specific cognitive skills involved in actual reading. We now understand that while cognitive skills or physical abilities (like memory, orientation, eye movements) are essential to reading, improving these skills by themselves do not teach reading itself. So it is very important to know that reading is taught by teaching reading and writing is taught by teaching writing.

### The 2000 National Reading Panel Report

Beginning in 1997, more than 100 000 studies were collected and evaluated by an American government panel created by the National Institute of Child Health, which was called the National Reading Panel (NRP). The NRP worked for three years to review all of the relevant, best done and important research into good reading instruction<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, 2000.



The NRP's most important conclusion in their report in 2000 is that the only effective reading approach is **direct specific reading instruction** – that is phonology based reading that involves five reading process components and instruction that is specifically geared to a concrete student's needs.

It is very important for us to understand that the ultimate goal of learning how to read text is to understand (in the sense of language) the text, i.e., what is usually called reading comprehension.

### The Five Components of good reading

After evaluating all of the research into reading and assessing all of the different ideas regarding the process of reading, the NRP decided that the main components of the reading process are:

1. **Phonemic awareness** – this is the process by which the reader understands that words are made up of separate sounds and the person has the ability to tell the difference between and manipulate these sounds. This ability is the base of an alphabetic principle – the principle that the learning reader internalizes that says that every language sound is represented by a letter or several letters.

#### Methods to improve weak phonemic awareness

- Teach your child to identify sounds in spoken words – ask him/her to separate and name the first, second, last, etc. sound in a word. Start with short and easy words, pronounce them stressing and exaggerating every sound. Then ask your child to name a definite sound. Start with the first and/or the last one. When the child is good at identifying those, choose middle sounds.
  - Teach your child to segment sounds in a word (this can be done even before a child knows the letters). Give your child a short simple word pronouncing it clearly and slowly, then ask the child to separate all the sounds he/she hears in the word.
  - Teach your child to blend sounds in a word. Give him/her separate sounds of short, simple words, e.g. sun, pronouncing each sound slowly and in an exaggerated way and also showing the number of the sounds with your fingers – /s/-/a/-/n/. When a child can segment and blend short and simple words, move to longer ones. These methods will help your child understand that each word is made up of sounds that come together and that each sound is represented by a letter or a letter combination.
2. **Phonics** – is the ability to represent each language sound with a letter or several letters. A child should understand the separate sounds are combined to form words. A person who can do this can easily sound out written words that he/she has never seen or heard before.

#### Methods to improve phonics knowledge

- Teach your child very directly by what letter or letter combination/s each language sound is represented.



- When your child starts learning English, teach him/her that in English some sounds can be represented by various letter combinations. Use a textbook that directly teaches phonics.

3. **Fluency** – is ability to decode a text accurately, quickly and with proper expression<sup>13</sup>.

#### Methods to improve reading fluency

- One effective way to improve fluency is monitored repeated reading. It means that a child reads the same text several times until he/she can read without mistakes. A good reader first reads the chosen text (which is appropriate for the child's functional reading level, i.e., where he/she does not make more than 10 mistakes per 100 words. A good reader follows a child's reading and marks all the mistakes he/she makes. Then the expert reader goes over the mistakes with the child and helps him/her to read the words correctly. Then the child reads the same text again. This helps a child automatize decoding of the words in the given text as somebody with dyslexia needs more exposures to words for this to happen. Reading of the text may need 5-8 repetitions until it is read without mistakes.
4. **Vocabulary** – is the words people have to know to be able to communicate and read<sup>14</sup>. Vocabulary has two parts – oral vocabulary and reading vocabulary. Vocabulary is very important to reading comprehension – without understanding the words of a language there is no way to understand what is being read.

#### Methods to increase vocabulary

- You can help enlarge your child's vocabulary directly or indirectly. Directly would be supporting her/him to learn new words and terms that appear in your child's school textbooks and dictionaries. Indirect way to enlarge your child's vocabulary is by reading to him/her or when he/she reads intensively himself/herself.
  - Another way of enlarging vocabulary can be via listening to audio school textbooks and audio literature books or listening to both of those using text-to-speech both in child's native and foreign languages he/she knows
5. **Comprehension** is the reason for reading because without comprehension the decoding of words is just a useless process.

#### Methods to improve comprehension

- Encourage your child to notice a word, a phrase, a sentence or a paragraph he/she does not understand. Being able to detect where his/her confusion about the meaning of the

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<sup>13</sup> Put reading first, 2003, pg. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Put reading first, 2003, pg. 34.



text stems from the child should be able to identify where it starts –then a good/expert reader can explain these parts in the text.

- Two other effective ways to improve comprehension is asking and answering questions about the text. So, make your child create questions about the text he/she has just read and ask them to others. Just the same answering the questions formed by others helps comprehend the text.

The work of the NRP led to an understanding that a good reading program or curriculum should have these components:

- explicit instruction in phonemic awareness;
- systematic phonics instruction;
- methods to improve fluency;
- ways to enhance comprehension;
- guided oral reading and;
- techniques to build vocabulary.

Any effective reading curriculum or program should explicitly teach the five components of reading and include the six kinds of instruction. If any of these components is missing or not dealt with directly, the programme will be probably not as effective as it could be in teaching reading.

### **Assessment – How is your son or daughter doing?**

Even if these components are present, it is important that his/her reading level be assessed often in younger grades. It is not enough for him/her to only take formal tests once or twice per year. Assessment should be frequent and results tracked.

The assessment can be as simple as your son or daughter's teacher listening to him/her read, taking notes of mistakes and of how many words per minute he/she is reading. The test results should be compared with others in the class. If his/her reading is significantly below the class average, the teacher should notify you.

### **How to know if your child is struggling with reading**

For most parents, it is quite obvious that their son/daughter is struggling in school. We know that his/her grades are low, he/she does not do his/her homework or he/she even refuses to go to school. Sometimes it is not so obvious.

Whether it is obvious or you just want to have an idea, here are two ways to understand whether your child is struggling – and it is easy.

- **Regularly listen to your child read**



Does he or she struggle reading a book that is the right age for him or her? If so, you should talk to his or her teacher.

- **Struggling can be heard in several ways – here are two ways:**

1. He/she makes more than 10 mistakes for every 100 words he/she reads in texts that he/she has already read in school.
2. He/she makes the same mistake consistently and seems not to remember a word he/she has just read. For example, your child has just painfully decoded a word and then in next sentences he/she reads it with great difficulty again as if not having seen it just now.

- **Regularly look at your child's written work**

- While we understand that our children make mistakes and can be sloppy, if you see that his/her writing is quite “challenging,” before you blame him/her for laziness, you should talk to his/her teacher to find out if there is a problem in school.

### **What can you or should you ask?**

Whether or not your son/daughter seems to be struggling with reading, you might wonder if he/she is getting good reading instruction.

You could ask the teacher or school administration:

- What system of reading instruction does our school use?
- Does it teach all of the components of reading? Or maybe - Please tell me the 5 components of reading and how each of the 6 skills is taught?
- Please tell me how (for example) you provide phonics instruction?
- How often is my son's/daughter's reading assessed? How do his/her scores compare to others? How is his/her reading changing over time?

This is, of course, only the beginning of the dialogue. You should be ready to ask deeper questions and try and get your school to explain the system they use to teach reading. If you do not get good answers or answers that do not satisfy you, consider where you might get better service.

### **Effective remediation for reading problems**

We are very lucky that there is a great body of research<sup>15</sup> and information about how to help children who struggle with learning how to read. This helps us to ask the right questions of professionals and also not to waste our time on methods that do not work and cost money.

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<sup>15</sup> Galuschka, Ise, Krick, & Schulte-Körne, 2014; Blachman, 1994.



### Not all schools have the same system for providing remediation

Some schools may simply provide help to every child who is struggling and some may insist that a child get tested and have a diagnosis of a specific reading disability. We should also know that some systems may start with group intervention and then proceed to individual help only if the group work is not effective.

But, we should be able to recognize whether the intervention program is evidence based.

### How can you recognize a good reading remediation program?

The accumulated evidence demonstrates that effective reading programs for students with reading disabilities involve **multisensory methods** – methods that involve all senses in learning to read and write – and are effective when your son/daughter is learning to read and write.

As with good general reading instruction, effective remediation addresses the five components and also improves the six skills. The difference is that remediation is **differentiated** – it should be targeted to the specific problems the child has. It is not good enough to say “read more” or do with every child in a group the same thing as with everybody else, for example, sound discrimination when a concrete student does not have any problems with it.

Every method should be effective – it should change student’s skills. To see if it is effective, the student’s success is to be measured. Every method used should change the student’s performance in reasonable time; usually there must be improvement in a child’s performance after 2-3 months<sup>16</sup>.

In general, the sooner dyslexia is diagnosed and reading remediation provided the better students’ progress in reading. The research shows that students whose reading disability is identified in grades 1-3, can almost close the achievement gap with their peers. Many intervention studies prove that “the most rapid gains are made within the first 12 hours of instruction; after that, progress continues, but the pace can seem very slow to students, parents, and teachers”<sup>17</sup>. Only very few of students whose dyslexia is identified after grade 3 close their reading gap fully. It may take 2-3 years of intensive individualized reading instruction (40 minutes a day in a small group or one-to-one class) to become a functional reader.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Torgesen, Alexander, Wagner, Rashotte, Voeller, & Conway, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Moats, & Dakin, 2008, pg. 67-68.

<sup>18</sup> Moats, & Dakin, 2008, pg. 68.



## 6. FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS - THE CHILD NEEDS TO EXPERIENCE SUCCESS AND BELIEVE IN HIMSELF/HERSELF

The learning journey of your child with dyslexia will be filled with struggles and successes. Your son/daughter and you (as parents) will experience an array of emotions in meeting the challenges and overcoming difficulties. In addition to standing up for your son/daughter's best interest and supporting his/her academic progress you need to look after their his/her and your own emotional well being.

Here are some ideas on how to help him/her to strengthen motivation and confidence and to become an independent and self-directed learner.

### Parental knowledge

Take time to learn about dyslexia and fully understand how the brain works and what support structures a child needs in order to learn to read. It may mean doing intensive research, speaking to specialists, taking courses or joining groups. The more information you have the better.

- You can seek help.
- You can explain the situation.
- You can support your child<sup>19</sup>.

### Empowering your child

As a parent you can help your child to understand what it means to have dyslexia and how this may affect his/her learning. You can show him/her that even though their learning journey may be a bumpy road he/she can learn to read and be successful both at school and in life.

- Explain. Describe to your child how the brain works and why he/she has difficulties with reading. This helps the child to see that dyslexia is not a flaw and his/her difficulties are not due to a lack of effort or stubbornness. Understanding the nature of the reading problems helps to your son/daughter in developing a positive self-image and preserve self-esteem.
- Give hope. Use positive examples of people with dyslexia. You can show that dyslexia does not stop many people from being successful. He/she can become an excellent reader with appropriate strategies, accommodations, tools, and hard work.
- Provide tools. Show your child different resources that are available.
- Be present. Let your child know that you are there to support him/her no matter what happens.
- Be patient.<sup>20</sup>

### Building self-esteem

Dyslexia is only one word to use when thinking and speaking about your child. The child is so much more than the way he/she learns to read, he/she has many wonderful attributes, talents and skills.

- Show your child that he/she is valuable and has a lot to offer.

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<sup>19</sup> Reid, 2003; Shaywitz, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Shaywitz, 2005; Snowling, 2000.



- Include your child in family decision making.
- Find fun activities to do together as a family.
- Help him/her to find interests that he/she can experience success in.
- Let him/her do things that he/she enjoys.
- Believe in his/her dreams and help him/her to achieve them.
- Notice and note when your child shows positive attitudes, works hard, makes progress, takes risks.
- Compliment and celebrate both big and small achievements.

### **Fostering a growth mind-set**

All children develop a view of their intelligence. Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck discovered that some children see intelligence as something fixed and others as something that can grow and change. Children with a growth mind-set show a positive attitude toward learning and are willing to put in more effort. You can help your child to develop a growth mind-set and understand that they are in charge of their own intellectual growth. Believing that you can succeed increases motivation.

- Explore together how the brain works and learning happens, and how the child gains a lot of power over how he/she learns or manages emotions. Brains are highly plastic and changed by different experiences.
- Teach metacognition. When your child learns to think about his/her own thinking he/she will, become aware of what he/she knows or does not know, discovers what strategies help best in learning, starts self-assessing and using questions to direct learning.
- Include the child in goal setting, planning and reflection.
- Foster risk taking. Explain that making mistakes and failures is a part of learning. The important thing is to try and not to give up and to learn from our mistakes.
- Show how commitment and continuous practice contribute to learning success. Use examples from other areas of life, e.g. babies learn to crawl and walk; toddlers to ride bikes; adults to drive cars; singers or ballet dancers to perform. Revisit the success stories of famous people who have dyslexia again.
- Let them know that learning takes time. Success doesn't come overnight. Remind them that during learning there will be various levels of success and struggles. Focus on the growth.

### **Teaching him/her to self-advocate, to speak up!**

As a parent you wish all the best for your child and you make sure that he/she gets the help and support needed to succeed. In the long run you wish for your child to have the strength and knowledge to stand up for her or himself, to find and use different tools.

Teach and encourage your child

- To ask questions.
- To ask for help. Talk through with your child how he/she learns best, what structures, environments, accommodations, and tools help him/her the most, so he/she would be able to ask for help and explain why it helps.



- To talk about dyslexia. You can watch videos, talk, and role play. When a child is comfortable with talking about dyslexia, it is easier for him/her to accept the situation and explain it to others when necessary.
- To use different resources independently. Once familiar with possibilities, the child doesn't have to wait for someone to direct him/her but he/she can seek, choose and use various tools by himself/herself.
- To know his/her rights. Depending on the age the child can become familiar with the legislation and his/her rights.<sup>21</sup>

### Take care of yourself

Being a parent of a child with dyslexia may be emotionally exhaustive, especially if you do not get the necessary support from the education system. To be a strong advocate for your child you need to take care of yourself.

- Do not be afraid to ask for help. You don't have to do all by yourself.
- Do not be afraid to seek professional counselling if you feel the need for it.
- Find time for yourself. Do things that bring you joy. This helps you to recharge.
- Make sure you get enough rest, eat well and exercise. This helps to keep you physically healthy and strong.
- Be forgiving. Nobody is perfect. You do what you can. You do enough.
- Look for reasons to be thankful.
- Have fun.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Baumel, retrieved 10.1.2015; Reid, 2003; Shaywitz, 2005; The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, retrieved 10.1.2015.

<sup>22</sup> Baumel, retrieved 10.1.2015; The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, retrieved 10.1.2015.

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## RESOURCES ABOUT DYSPLEXIA, INSTRUCTION, ACCOMMODATION AND ICT

### General information (definition, symptoms, frequency)

1. Sally Shaywitz *“Overcoming Dyslexia”*, Vintage Books, New York, 2013.
2. Luisa Cook Moats, Karen E. Dakin *“Basic Facts About Dyslexia & Other Reading Problems”*, The International Dyslexia Association, Baltimore, Maryland, 2008.
3. Abigail Marshall *“The Everything Parent's Guide To Children With Dyslexia: All You Need To Ensure Your Child's Success”*, Adams Media, Avon, Massachusetts, 2004.
4. International Dyslexia Association, Frequently Asked Questions About Dyslexia, <http://www.interdys.org/FAQ.htm> (31.10.2014)

### Good reading instruction and accommodation

1. *Put Reading First. The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read. Kindergarten Through Grade 3*. Second Edition, National Institute for Literacy, 2003.
2. Marcia K. Henry. *“Unlocking Literacy. Effective Decoding & Spelling Instruction”*, Paul. H. Brookes Publishing Co, Baltimore, 2003. (also good for teaching English as a foreign language)
3. *International Dyslexia Association, Information on Interventions and Instructions* <http://www.interdys.org/InsInt.htm> (31.10.2014)
4. Gavin Reid. *“Dyslexia. A Practitioner's Handbook”*, third edition, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2003.
5. Arlene R. H. Pincus, ed. *“Tips from the Experts: A Compendium of Advice on Literacy Instruction from Educators and Researchers”*, The International Dyslexia Association, New Jersey.
6. *International Dyslexia Association, foreign language acquisition*, <http://www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/AtRiskStudentsForeignLanguage2012.pdf> (31.10.2014)
7. Anna Cashwell Tuley. *“Never Too Late to Read”*, York Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1998.
8. Self-Study-Course «Dyslexia for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language». <http://www.dystefl.eu/index.php?id=20> (31.10.2014)
9. Reuven Feuerstein, Rafi S. Feuerstein, & Lou Falik. *„Beyond Smarter: mediated learning and the brain's capacity for change”*, Teachers College Press, New York, 2010.
10. Sylvia Moody. *“Dyslexia: a Teenager's Guide”*, Ebury Publishing, Vermilion, 2004.
11. Christine Ostler, *“Dyslexia: A Parent's Survival Guide”*, Ammonite Books, Godalming, 2011.
12. Christine Ostler, *“Study Skills: A Pupil's Survival Guide”*, Ammonite Books, Godalming, 2009.
13. Ian Smythe, *“Dyslexia in the Digital Age: Making IT Work”*, Continuum, London, New York, 2010.
14. James J. Bauer, *“Too Much Time on Sycamore Street: A Self-Help Resource for Adolescents and Adults With Learning Disabilities”*, Educational Media Corp, 1999.

### “Leisure time reading” which may help to understand dyslexia

1. Barbara P. Guyer, *“The Pretenders: Gifted People Who Have Difficulty Learning”*, New Lenox: High Tide Press, 1997.
2. James J. Bauer, *“The Runaway Learning Machine: Growing Up Dyslexic”*, Educational Media Corp, 2001.
3. Maryanne Wolf, *„Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain“*, New York: Harper Perennial, 2008.