



## KINGSGATE SPEECH, LANGUAGE & READING

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### IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD MIGHT BE DYSLEXIC

#### *What is dyslexia?*

Dyslexia is a reading and language disorder. Individuals with dyslexia have difficulty with reading, spelling, writing and oftentimes, oral language skills even though they have normal intellectual ability and appropriate educational opportunities.

In 2003, the *International Dyslexia Association (IDA)* and the *NICHD* offered this definition to reflect the scientific research that has advanced our understanding of dyslexia:

*Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It 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. (Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 2003).*

#### *What are some early signs that my child might be at risk for dyslexia?*

Most risk factors can be detected in kindergarten and first grade. Signs include **trouble associating sounds with letters**, and **trouble with phonological awareness** and **oral language development**.

Children with dyslexia almost always have **difficulty learning to match letter symbols to speech sounds** (phonics). This naturally interferes with the child's ability to sound out printed words accurately and fluently.

**Difficulty with phonological awareness** is the core deficit of dyslexia. More specifically, **phonemic awareness**, or the ability to notice, think about and work with the individual sounds of words plays a vital role in learning to read. Most children with dyslexia have trouble identifying the separate speech sounds that make up words. For example, they may have trouble recognizing that *cat* is made up of three sounds /c/ /a/ /t/ and *gift* has four /g/ /i/

/f//t/. In fact, researchers have noted that the best predictor of reading ability in kindergarten and first grade is performance is this ability to segment phonemes.

Children with dyslexia often have **difficulty with several aspects of oral language**. These children may mispronounce words, confuse word meanings and produce ungrammatical sentences. Older children who are writing may produce writing samples that are shorter and more disorganized than their peers, and have more trouble understanding figures of speech, and more difficulty making inferences.

A more complete checklist for **Early Identification of Language-Based Reading Disabilities** (From Catts, H.W., 1977) can be used to further assess children who may be vulnerable to reading difficulty. It is meant to be used with children in the end of Kindergarten or the beginning of first grade. (*Checklist located last page of article*)

### ***If my child is having trouble learning to read in kindergarten and first grade, should I wait and see if it develops naturally?***

Early identification of dyslexia is extremely important. Children who receive help immediately when they begin to show signs of difficulty can avoid more serious problems that occur when early detection is not made. In fact, research tells us that reading problems identified in Grade 3 and beyond require considerable intervention and 74% of these same children will still have reading problems in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. It is important to remember that children do not simply outgrow reading problems but require science validated teaching methods that result in reading success. We now know that the neural systems for reading are malleable and highly responsive to effective instruction.

### ***If I suspect my child might have dyslexia, what should I do?***

If you suspect that your child may be at risk, it is important to obtain a thorough assessment by a qualified evaluator. The local branch of the *International Dyslexia Association*, (in Washington it is [www.WABIDA.org](http://www.WABIDA.org)), maintains lists of individuals whom you may contact. However, since they do not endorse any individual or clinic, it is up to you to make the necessary inquiries when you contact an evaluator. The evaluator is likely to have a website or printed materials regarding the types of tests used and the specifics of what the assessment may involve.

Once the evaluation has been completed the evaluator will sit down with you and have a conference to explain the test results.

### ***What will the test report include?***

Dyslexia is a complex language processing disorder and will require a broad look at many aspects of learning. An experienced evaluator will understand the specific language learning

difficulties that are specific to dyslexia and will be able to differentiate it from other types of learning problems.

A typical evaluation will include information about your child's **cognitive and intellectual abilities** including information about his attention, memory, reasoning abilities, visual spatial and visual motor abilities, and mathematical abilities and will explain your child's **specific strengths and weaknesses**.

It will include information about your child's **speech and language skills** such as his ability to pronounce words, retrieve words, understand word meanings and sentence meanings. Other specific language skills noted to relate to reading success will be assessed such as rapid naming, sound-letter awareness, morphological awareness and his ability to understand and express himself with language.

Your child's ability to **decode single words** or specifically read single words out of context, a skill that can be very difficult for children with dyslexia, will be assessed. In addition, the child will be asked to read **nonsense words** (scritch, pom) to assess his knowledge of syllables and sound-letter correspondences.

He will be asked to **read paragraphs** out loud to find out how accurate and fluent he is. This will give the evaluator information about how quickly and accurately he reads compared to other children his age.

**Reading comprehension** will be evaluated to see how well your child understands what he reads. Many children with dyslexia have good comprehension skills as they are able to benefit from reading words in context. However, if the child is having difficulty decoding words, it can disrupt the flow of ideas and take a toll on his understanding of what he reads.

Your child's **spelling** will be evaluated since almost all dyslexics have significant problems with spelling. Evaluation of his spelling errors will give information about the nature and severity of his spelling problems.

For children who are writing, the evaluator will obtain a sample of his ability to **write sentences and compose a story or essay**.

**Handwriting** will be assessed including his ability to write the alphabet from memory under timed conditions. The evaluator may also want to see how well the child is able to copy sentences and will compare his handwriting under these conditions with his handwriting when he was composing a story/essay in the above task.

**Specific recommendations for home, school, and instruction** will be given. There may also be a statement about the child's right to special education services and to accommodations.

Finally, if the results indicate that your child has dyslexia or a language-based reading problem, the evaluator will provide you will a list of professionals in your community who are qualified to work with your child.

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## EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF LANGUAGE-BASED READING DISABILITIES: A CHECKLIST

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday \_\_\_\_\_

Date Completed \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

This checklist is designed to identify children who are at risk for language-based reading disabilities. Each of the descriptors listed below should be carefully considered and those that characterize the child's behavior/history should be checked. A child receiving a large number of checks should be referred for a more in-depth evaluation.

### **SPEECH SOUND AWARENESS**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Doesn't understand and enjoy rhymes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Doesn't easily recognize that words begin with the same sound
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty counting the syllables in spoken words
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has problem clapping hands or tapping feet in rhythm with songs and/or rhymes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Demonstrates problems learning sound-letter correspondences

### **WORD RETRIEVAL**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty retrieving a specific word (e.g. calls a sheet a 'goat' or says, 'you know, a woolly animal')
- \_\_\_\_\_ Shows poor memory for classmates' names
- \_\_\_\_\_ Speech is hesitant, filled with pauses or vocalizations (e.g. "um," "you know")
- \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently uses words lacking specificity ("stuff," "thing," "what you call it")
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has a problem remembering/retrieving verbal sequences (e.g. days of the week, alphabet)

### **VERBAL MEMORY**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty remembering instructions or directions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Shows problems learning names of people or places
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty remembering the words to songs or poems
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has problems learning a second language

### **SPEECH PRODUCTION/PERCEPTION**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Has problems saying common words with difficult sound patterns (e.g. *animal, cinnamon, specific*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mishears and subsequently mispronounces words or names
- \_\_\_\_\_ Confuses a similar sounding word with another word (e.g. saying, "The Entire State Building is in New York")
- \_\_\_\_\_ Combines sound patterns with similar words (e.g. saying "escavator" for *escalator*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Shows frequent slips of the tongue (e.g. saying "brue bluch" for *blue brush*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty with tongue twisters (e.g. , *she sells seashells*)

### **COMPREHENSION**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Only responds to part of a multiple element request or instruction
- \_\_\_\_\_ Requests multiple repetitions of instructions/directions with little improvement in comprehension
- \_\_\_\_\_ Relies too much on context to understand what is said
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty understanding questions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fails to understand age-appropriate stories
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty making inferences, predicting outcomes, drawing conclusions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lacks understanding of spatial terms such as *left/right, front/back*

### **EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Talks in short sentences
- \_\_\_\_\_ Makes errors in grammar (e.g. "he goed to the store" or "me want that")
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lacks variety in vocabulary (e.g. uses "good" to mean *happy, kind, polite*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty giving directions or explanations (e.g. may show multiple revisions or dead ends)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Relates stories or events in a disorganized or incomplete manner
- \_\_\_\_\_ May have much to say, but provides little specific detail
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty with the rules of convention, such as turn taking, staying on topic, indicating when he/she does not understand.

Checklist for early identification of language-based reading disabilities. (From Catts, H.W. [1997]. Appendix A: Early identification of language-based reading disabilities. A checklist. *Language, Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 28, 88-89; reprinted by permission. Some descriptors have been taken from *Language for learning: A checklist for language difficulties*, Melbourne, Australia: OZ student.