

# Learning Disabilities Association

## FACT SHEET

### DYSLEXIA

Educational Services Committee  
May 1996

#### What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a learning disability in the area of reading. It is included in the category of "Learning Disabilities" in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A person with dyslexia is someone with average to above average intelligence whose problem in reading is not the result of emotional problems, lack of motivation, poor teaching, mental retardation or vision or hearing deficits. The term *dyslexia*, however, is defined in different ways. While reading is the basic problem, people include different aspects of reading and related problems in their definitions. For example:

- Problems learning to translate printed words into spoken words with ease, beginning reading skills (decoding)
- Problems with word identification and/or reading comprehension

Persons with dyslexia often reverse or mis-sequence letters within words when reading or writing (b/d, brid/bird, on/no). They may also exhibit difficulties with one or more of the following:

- Perceiving and/or pronouncing words
- Understanding spoken language
- Recalling known words
- Handwriting
- Spelling
- Written language
- Math computation

#### What is reading?

Reading is more than translating print into the spoken word (decoding). **Reading is getting meaning from print.** People who have not developed automatic word recognition skills may have comprehension problems because their energy is focused on identifying words rather than thinking about what they mean. Many of these children and adults read very slowly, often having to read things more than once to understand. Others have automatic word recognition skills, but cannot comprehend what they read. They may also have trouble understanding spoken language.

#### What causes dyslexia?

The basic cause of dyslexia is not known, however, much research is being done to determine the problems underlying dyslexia. Research indicates that, in many cases, dyslexia is inherited and may occur in several members of a family. Studies are being done to determine whether there are slight differences in the brains of people with dyslexia. Recent research indicates that many children having difficulty learning early reading skills (decoding) also have problems hearing individual sounds in words, analyzing whole words into parts, and blending sounds into words (phonological processing).

#### What should be done when dyslexia is suspected?

Individuals suspected of having a reading disability should have a comprehensive psychoeducational evaluation including hearing, vision and intelligence testing. This evaluation **should include all areas of learning and learning processes**, not just reading. The diagnostician(s) should then be able to determine whether there are additional learning disabilities, make recommendations for teaching methods, and specify whether additional services are needed.

In many schools children are not identified as having a reading disability until they have failed for an extended period because of a "formula" used to determine whether a student is "eligible" for special services. **A child should *not* have to fail for two or three years to demonstrate evidence of a learning disability.**

### **What educational interventions are appropriate?**

If a child is diagnosed as having a reading disability (or dyslexia), it is important for parents to ask exactly what the problem is, what method for teaching reading is recommended, and why it was selected. There are many approaches to teaching children with reading disabilities to read. Recent research on beginning reading skills indicated that many children having difficulty benefit from direct instruction in phonological processing and a multi-sensory phonics approach to reading. There is, however, no single method that will be effective with every child. A change in method should be considered if progress is not seen in a reasonable length of time. **Selecting the appropriate reading method for a child with a reading disability is critical for success.**

Widely advertised reading programs that claim to be successful in teaching phonics/reading to anyone should be viewed with caution. It is highly recommended that before investing in these programs, research documenting their effectiveness with individuals having diagnosed reading disabilities (**dyslexia**) be requested and reviewed.

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