

Reading Problems/Dyslexia

A Mixed Bag

Dyslexia means that a child or grown-up has a problem with words or language. Poor word or language skills can show up as a “mixed bag” of disabilities in some of the following areas:

- Listening
- Writing
- Reading
- Spelling
- Speaking

The factor that dyslexic people have in common is that they read at levels significantly lower than people of a similar age and intelligence.

Dyslexia is found among all ranges of intelligence from slow learners to geniuses. A few of our gifted, dyslexic people include Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, John F. Kennedy, Mozart, Walt Disney, Magic Johnson, Tom Cruise and Danny Glover.

Dyslexic children and adults usually learn differently than most people, which is a disadvantage during teaching moments. Most parents and teachers, who generally teach the way they learn best, are left-brained. Dyslexic people often (but not always) use more of their right brain for learning. Many dyslexics

- Have a better sense of spatial relationships (understand the 3 dimensional world). Words on a flat page are often less easy for them to comprehend.
- Learn more easily without being told every step. They might answer their math problems without going through the steps shown in the textbook.
- Learn better by doing or experiencing as opposed to listening or reading.
- Use touch, music, rhythm, objects, actions and pictures to learn. The repetition of hearing information is not as helpful.

Reading has a lot to do with being able to hear each letter sound. This is true even if we read silently, because the words are still being spoken in our mind. Each letter sound has its own frequency or pitch. Some sounds, such as the “b” and “p” or “f” and “th” have nearly the same frequency. Some people confuse these sounds. A short “a” as in “bad” is very close in sound to the short “e” as in “bed”. It is difficult for children to learn their letter sounds, when they cannot hear the differences among them. A person who cannot accurately interpret letter sounds or the spoken word is said to have an **auditory processing problem**. This can lead to difficulties with decoding or sounding out words.

Reading comprehension problems can be related to a poor vocabulary or the slow pronunciation or decoding of words. Vocabulary can be enriched through exposure to new experiences, a wider variety of reading material and vocabulary exercises. If an auditory processing problem is preventing a person from hearing sounds correctly or quickly, however, their related problems with listening to information, reading, spelling, writing and speaking may never go away. Many adults continue to have difficulty with the same skills that were difficult for them in school.

Reading requires that the ears and eyes work together. At the moment the eyes look at a letter in a word, the ears and brain should be translating the letter into a sound. As the eyes move from letter to letter, the ears need to keep up with the sounds. Some people's ears are unable to sound out the letters as quickly as the eyes move. Also, when eye muscles are underdeveloped, there can be an eye-tracking problem. The eyes may not focus on the page well or move smoothly across the letters. Whenever the eyes and ears do not work together, there is a reading problem or dyslexia.

Listening training or auditory training helps most dyslexic people read, write, spell, listen and speak better, because their ears are trained to listen to sounds more accurately. The ears are then better able to discriminate among letter sounds and speech sounds. In addition, the vestibular system in the ears is tuned up. This system is connected to every muscle in the body including the eye muscles. For some, eye tracking improves due to the better muscle tone that's developed during listening training.

Dyslexia is more common than most people realize, when we consider that the poor use of language or words falls within a range from mild to severe. Not a simple label, dyslexia is truly a mixed bag of disabilities.

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