

# **Strategies to Treat Dyslexia and Related Learning Difficulties**

## **Recognizing Dyslexia**

Dyslexia is a neurological condition manifesting in children, who typically are average in intelligence, struggling academically. This tends to be confounding for parents who, based on their child's aptitude and general abilities in regard to problem-solving, should be able to read without too much difficulty but, nonetheless, they tend to struggle. Unfortunately, sometimes these children are labeled as "lazy" when, in fact, they tend to be working more diligently than other children to "keep up." Students who are evaluated by the School Psychologist may demonstrate a "discrepancy" between ability and achievement in that, typically they are, as described above, average or near-average in intelligence but performing well below-grade level. However, often the 'discrepancy' is not significant enough to meet criteria for special education until at least third grade. These children may struggle with spelling in regard to "phonetic" spelling errors (spelling words the way they sound) as well as difficulties with visual tracking. They tend to write letters and number backwards and have confusion over left/right differentiation. Spelling errors are also a common manifestation and they may demonstrate "jumbled" spellings in which all of the correct letters are present but in the wrong order. Children with dyslexia tend to rely on visual memory but, unfortunately, struggle in that regard relative to spelling and reading capacity.

### **Difficulties Copying From the Board:**

Children with dyslexia tend to need extra support and attention when copying from the board. They need extra time and notes need to be succinct and clear. It can be a struggle to accurately perceive letters and numbers written in black on a shiny white board.

### **Difficulty Following 2-3 Step Instructions:**

Children with dyslexia not uncommonly struggle with phonemic difficulties and sometimes have difficulty organizing their thoughts and surroundings. Consequently, when provided with multi-step directions, they tend to become confused. It is important for instruction to be brief, succinct, and repetitive if possible.

### **Positive Aspects of Dyslexia**

Children with dyslexia may struggle with reading but, by the same token, they have numerous strengths including being quite creative, physically athletic, and empathetic, given their plight. They may excel in various vocations including in the creative arts, personnel service, customer advice, as well as sports management and training.

### **Causes of Dyslexia**

Dyslexia tends to be inherited in that, almost invariably, if a child has dyslexia, a parent or relative does as well. Interestingly, there is often left-handedness somewhere in the family of children who have dyslexia though such is not a causative factor. There is also evidence of "ectopic" cells that failed to move to the brain's surface at the time when the brain was developing, that may have some correlation with dyslexia. Moreover, there is evidence that the brain of children with

dyslexia is working inefficiently in regard to understanding language in that, for example, using the right side of the brain to a greater extent than non-dyslexic children for the use of language skills. There is also evidence of conductive hearing loss that may contribute to dyslexia.

### ***Learning Strategies***

Children with dyslexia tend to have, as a foundational deficit, difficulties with phonemic awareness. In that regard, they have difficulty understanding the connection between letters and the sounds they make. Fortunately, there are a number of strategies to enhance phonemic awareness including games and activities. It is vital to review, and promote mastery of, the 26-letters of the alphabet and their accompanying phonemes. Reading activities are particularly helpful as well, including using the "Golden Rule" that involves telling the child the words they do not know without having them struggle during the reading activity. This promotes both enjoyment in the child's reading, as well as subsequent learning, given the repetition of the activity. There are also phonemic matching games, playing "I Spy" ("I spy something that begins with the "sh" sound..."), and using the various published phonic books that provide elusive simple words along with exercises and games.

Children with dyslexia often struggle with a lack of self-confidence given the academic difficulties they face essentially on a daily basis. Consequently, it is vital to emphasize their strengths that typically include coordination, creativity, and empathy with others. Cognitive therapy can also be utilized to help them "re-think" how they view themselves in a more realistic and accurate manner, focusing on their strengths as opposed to weaknesses. By increasing the child's confidence, motivational levels can also be enhanced, which further the child's academic functioning.

### **Teaching Strategies**

A multisensory approach is optimal in working with children with dyslexia. In that regard, children with dyslexia tend to be at a disadvantage when being provided with instruction based solely in the visual or the auditory. Children with dyslexia tend to benefit from the aforementioned multi-sensory approach utilizing sight, hearing, touch, and movement. This can be accomplished by teaching children in a traditional manner, utilizing the visual and auditory senses and, additionally, utilizing a tactile approach by letting the child draw the letter, using their finger, on the carpet or using sand paper in a similar manner. Visual imagery can also be helpful by, for example, recalling the word "bed" and visualizing the direction of the "b and d" letters (and a person sleeping between the two letters, as if on a bed). A number of routine-oriented strategies can be helpful in the classroom setting including providing an outline prior to the lesson being taught; printing keywords in upper case letters; using colored chalk to distinguish activities; and leaving writing on the blackboard long enough to ensure the child does not have to rush. Even better, would be to provide a photocopy of the assignment sheet to the dyslexic child. It also helps to be provided off-white colored paper and larger font (14 or above) in Arial. It is also vital to avoid using overhead transparencies. Tasks need to be broken-down into small easily remembered pieces of information. It also helps to use a highlighter to emphasize keywords, main ideas, as well as important names and vocabulary. It is important to not ask a dyslexic child to read aloud in class. Cursive joined writing is most helpful to children with dyslexic problems, given that they can use their visual memory in helping to recall the sequence of the letters. Voice dictation software can be helpful and learning to type. Upwards of 90% of dyslexic children also have

problems in mathematics such that use of a calculator can be helpful too, as well as encouraging pupils to verbalize and talk their way through each step of the problem.

Work should be just below the child's actual level of ability. Errors should be indicated by a 'dot' (rather than a line or X), and child should be permitted to correct the mistake, at which time the dot is turned into a check to indicate a correct response. It's best to provide ample praise. Worksheets should provide lots of pictures, illustrations, and color (visual cues are vital). Arial is the best type-face and not less than 14 point in size.

Children who struggle with dysgraphia will benefit from typing their work or using voice-recognition software.

Focus on strengths

Provide a clear subject overview

Link key concepts and constantly revisit previously covered areas

Provide clear and concise visual handouts using diagrams, mind maps and pictures.

Use large text on colored paper

Teach organizational skills (files with color-coded subject areas...)

Use visual diagrams and graphs as opposed to 'wordy' paragraph.

Allow for use of typing rather than writing

Ignore spelling errors in text

Use oral testing

Untimed tests

Dictated responses

Short answer and multiple choice

Provide model answers

### **Ways Parents Can Help Their Dyslexic Child Or Teenager (including the "Golden Rule")**

Homework and reading can be quite stressful for children who struggle with dyslexia. During reading activities, it is common for parents to request a child to "sound-out" mispronounced words. Rather, a more effective approach is to utilize the "Golden Rule" during which, if the child does not correctly pronounce the word within 1-2 seconds, the parent pronounces the word for the child and moves along in the passage. This way, motivation to continue reading, as well as increased pleasure in reading is maintained and the child will learn the word thereafter through repetition. Paired reading is also helpful in regard to taking turns reading passages with the child. Specific readers are helpful including those that provide repetition of words including "*Chicken Little, The Enormous Turnip, and Three Billy Goats Gruff*". Additional support can be provided through a spelling self-checker as well as word processors. It is important to make use of visual strengths through the use of visual imagery and related strategies.

A group of ten words tend to give children with dyslexia more problems: any, many, does, because, friend, island, eyes, said, they, and enough. Some 'tricks' to help remember the spelling include, respectively:

Any: Ants Never Yawn

Many: Many Ants Never Yawn

Does: Daddy Often Eats Sweets

Because: Big Elephants Can Add Up Sums Easily

Friend: I to the End will be your Friend  
 Island: Is Land for sale? Or I See Land  
 Eyes: Every Yellow Elephant Smiles with his eyes  
 Said: I said: Sally-Anne is Dangerous  
 They: They saw The Hot Elephant Yawn  
 Enough: Elephants Never Own Ugly Houses

Correct writing posture includes the child sitting up and holding pen with one hand, and controlling the paper with the other.

### **Helping A Dyslexic Child Or Teenager Improve In Mathematics**

It has been estimated that approximately 50-60% of dyslexic children have problems in at least some areas of mathematics. The primary issue is difficulty with sequencing including getting things in the right order such that many dyslexic children find it difficult, for example, to count backward from 100. As described above, a multisensory approach is beneficial including, for example, using concrete items such as marbles or other items that can be lined-up and grouped. Once lined-up, the items can be counted forward or backward and the child can see how items are grouped together in a series of tens. When teaching sequencing, it is vitally important that the "Tell Me The Number After" strategy is utilized to ensure mastery of the material. It is also vital to ensure the child recognizes the numbers where they change of tens and children should not learn to count backwards until they can play the game of "Tell Me The Next Number" confidently. Thereafter, an introductory mathematics worksheet can be utilized to memorize times tables including making individual cards for each multiplication table. Various games can also be utilized including the mathematics game called "pairs", which is a fun matching game, practicing mathematics tables. It is important to encourage the child to say the problems aloud, which helps with short-term memory as well as document each step of the math problem during the resolution process. In that regard, part of the 'multi-sensory approach' includes the child hearing him or herself say the word or math-step, which helps to promote learning. Checking answers with a calculator is prudent. When teaching the counting of money sums, the use of real coins and dollar bills is especially helpful.

### **Further Strategies to Treat Dyslexia**

Dr. John Carosso, Psy.D.  
 Dyslexia Diagnostic and Treatment Center  
 dyslexiatreaters.com

<http://www.readingrockets.org./target>

### **RESOURCES**

The following resources are recommended to assist with treatment planning:

#### **To address attention-deficit/hyperactivity:**

- ChildsworK-Childsplay ([www.childsworK.com](http://www.childsworK.com)): quality resource for counseling games and books for children
- Taking Charge of ADHD (Barkley)
- Various workbooks including: The "Putting On The Breaks" Activity Book For Young People With ADHD; and The Best of "Brakes" (Quinn & Stern)

- Getting a Grip on ADD: A Kid's Guide to Understanding and Coping with Attention Disorders (Frank and Smith)
- ADD/ADHD Behavior Change Resource Kit (Flick)

#### **Information about medication**

- Straight Talk About Psychiatric Medications For Kids (Wilens)
- Medications for School-Age Children: Effects on Learning and Behavior (Brown and Sawyer)

#### **Learning Disabilities**

- Learning Disabilities Association of America (<http://www.ldanatl.org>)

#### **Tackling Dyslexia**

- [www.barringtonstoke.co.uk](http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk)  
useful website for to find reading materials you child will enjoy (and can read), and useful information.
- [http://www.dyslexia-parent.com/world\\_of\\_dyslexia.html](http://www.dyslexia-parent.com/world_of_dyslexia.html)  
Loads of useful information, news, research, and links
- <http://www.dys-add.com/>  
Bright Solutions
- <http://www.readinghorizons.com/>  
Reading Horizons
- Google "*phonics games*" to play fun games with your child teaching phonics and reading skills. For example: [http://www.softschools.com/language\\_arts/phonics/](http://www.softschools.com/language_arts/phonics/)
- **Highly Recommended - Use of the EdMark Reading program:**  
<http://www.donjohnston.com/products/edmark/index.html>
  - **What is Dyslexia?: A Book Explaining Dyslexia For Kids and Adults to Use Together.** Hultquist, A.
  - **The Gift of Dyslexia, Revised and Expanded: Why Some of the Smartest People Can't Read, and How They Can Learn.** Davis, R.

### **RECOMMENDED GOALS AND STRATEGIES**

It is recommended that the comprehensive behavioral/treatment plan utilizes the following strategies and interventions in the respective domains:

#### **DOMAIN: FAMILY / LEGAL GUARDIAN**

#### **The following goals are recommended to be targeted for this domain:**

##### **Behavioral Goals**

Compliance (following direction by second prompt)  
Exercise and healthy diet  
Follow routine with increased independence (less need for prompting)  
Increase attention to task  
Generalization of skills to other domains, e.g. school, community...

#### **To achieve the behavioral goals, the following is recommended:**

It is recommended that the following specific interventions are implemented:

Targeting Attention To Task and Overactivity (these strategies can also be used in the classroom setting)

*Possible strategies to address listening comprehension skills may include, but are not limited to:*

- Get child's attention before you speak
- Break information into shorter "chunks"
- Encourage child to let you know when he/she doesn't understand
- Restate, rephrase, restructure
- Check for understanding (What did I say? Can you tell me what you heard?)
- Take breaks after listening activities
- Speak/read slowly
- Use praise and rewards for positive listening behaviors
- Ask open-ended questions to find out how much child remembers and understands of what he/she hears
- Repeat important points
- Call child by name when important information is presented
- Provide visual information to support auditory information
- Tell child what to listen for before delivering auditory information
- Use pictures and diagrams to deliver information
- After listening to a story, have child recall the names of characters, main events, sequences
- Reduce distracting stimuli as much as possible
- Make sure child is attending when directions are given

*Strategies to increase self-control and frustration level may include, but are not limited to:*

- Present all tasks in carefully arranged sequences from easy to difficult
- Provide frequent reassurance
- Provide as many successful experiences as possible
- Give child ample "warning" when situations will be coming up that require extra control or attention

*Strategies to address inappropriate/off-task behaviors may include, but are not limited to:*

- Provide consistent rules that are listed or stated clearly and enforced with consistency
- Develop a contract or agreement so that expectations are clear and understood, pinpoint the desired behavior and the resultant consequences
- Consistently and immediately reinforce the desired behavior with a meaningful reinforcer (e.g.-verbal praise; tangible reward; notes, free-time; special privileges or activities)
- Stop misbehavior in time (when possible) - Don't wait until the situation is out of hand
- Program for a variety of changes - activities with a great deal of manual emphasis are more likely to succeed than heavy doses of desk work
- Make tasks clear and orderly and give child time to complete on task before beginning another
- Establish time limits and maintain consistent, clear, ground rules
- Games and activities that teach self-modulation may also help to increase attention span and control impulsive behavior. Games where the child must rapidly switch between loud and quiet sounds or between moving and being still are recommended.
- Play/arts-crafts activities, both at home and at school, provide one forum for increasing the attention span. At the beginning of an activity time, child might be given a choice of activities or toys. A timer could be set, perhaps for ten minutes. Child should be redirected to the activity each time physical wandering or inattention to the activity is observed. At the end of the interval, he/she could be given a choice of continuing the activity or putting things away. In general, child should be required to put one group of toys away before being permitted to play with anything else or moving from the area. This tends to reduce jumping from one thing to another and to promote more sustained play. At home, it may be desirable to "rotate" child's toys, to put some away for a period of time and encourage play with the remaining ones for more extended periods. This may help to discourage the tendency to fit from one toy to the next without engaging in ongoing play with any item.

-The tone and approach taken by adults with child can also lead to overstimulation. Child will likely perform best when addressed in a quiet voice. A loud voice volume may be too stimulating, particularly in the course of reprimanding. This will also help by modeling appropriate tone of voice for child, which is likely also a problem at this point.

**DOMAIN: EDUCATIONAL / VOCATIONAL**

**The following goals are recommended to be targeted for this domain:**

Successful transitions between activities  
 On-task behavior  
 Assignment completion  
 Homework completion  
 Attention to task  
 Successful inclusion experiences

**To achieve the goals, the following is recommended:**

*Interventions to address Attention Deficit and Overactivity:*

Several suggestions include:

- Seating near the teacher
- Providing instructions in close proximity to student
- Placing desk away from other students
- Seating child near pro-social peer
- Seating child away from distracters such as windows, heating systems

By changing the way the lesson is prepared, the teacher can maintain order in the classroom while keeping students interested. Some suggestions are:

- Writing key points on the board
- Providing visual aides
- Making sure directions are understood
- Breaking longer tasks into smaller components
- Providing written outline
- Reviewing key points with student orally
- Using Multi-sensory modalities
- Using computer assisted instruction

Completing assignments can be very difficult for children with AD/HD. The following are suggested:

- Provide extra time to finish assignments
- Simplify complex directions so that the child only has to remember one or two rules
- Distribute worksheets one at a time
- Simplify reading levels of assignments
- Shorten assignments (e.g. only do the odd numbers; Read one chapter instead of three)
- Use an egg-timer that is a visual representation of how long the student has to work.

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**Phonological awareness** is a broad skill that includes identifying and manipulating units of oral language – parts such as words, syllables, and onsets and rimes. Children who have phonological awareness are able to identify and make oral rhymes, can clap out the number of syllables in a

word, and can recognize words with the same initial sounds like *money* and *mother*.

*Phonemic awareness* refers to the specific ability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. Phonemes are the smallest units comprising spoken language. Phonemes combine to form syllables and words. The word *mat*, for example, has three phonemes, /m/ /a/ /t/. There are 44 phonemes in the English language, including sounds represented by letter combinations such as /th/. Acquiring phonemic awareness is important because it is the foundation for spelling and word recognition skills. *Phonemic awareness is one of the best predictors of how well children will learn to read during the first two years of school instruction*

### **What the problem looks like**

#### **A kid's perspective: What this feels like to me**

Children will usually express their frustration and difficulties in a general way, with statements like "I hate reading!" or "This is stupid!". But if they could, this is how kids might describe how difficulties with phonological or phonemic awareness affect their reading:

- I don't know any words that rhyme with *cat*.
- What do you mean when you say, "What sounds are in the word *brush*?"
- I'm not sure how many syllables are in my name.
- I don't know what sounds are the same in *bit* and *hit*.

#### **A parent's perspective: What I see at home**

Here are some clues for parents that a child may have problems with phonological or phonemic awareness:

- She has difficulty thinking of rhyming words for a simple word like *cat* (such as *rat* or *bat*).
- She doesn't show interest in language play, word games, or rhyming.
- Click here to find out [what parents can do](#) to help a child at home.

#### **A teacher's perspective: What I see in the classroom**

Here are some clues for teachers that a student may have problems with phonological or phonemic awareness:

- She doesn't correctly complete blending activities; for example, put together sounds /k/ /i/ /ck/ to make the word *kick*.
- He doesn't correctly complete phoneme substitution activities; for example, change the /m/ in *mate* to /cr/ in order to make *crate*.
- He has a hard time telling how many syllables there are in the word *paper*.
- He has difficulty with rhyming, syllabication, or spelling a new word by its sound.

### How to help

With the help of parents and teachers, kids can learn strategies to cope with phonological and/or phonemic awareness problems that affect his or her reading. Below are some tips and specific things to do.

### What kids can do to help themselves

- Be willing to play word and sounds games with parents or teachers.
- Be patient with learning new information related to words and sounds. Giving the ears a workout is difficult!
- Practice hearing the individual sounds in words. It may help to use a plastic chip as a counter for each sound you hear in a word.
- Be willing to practice writing. This will give you a chance to match sounds with letters.

### What parents can do to help at home

- Check with your child's teacher or principal to make sure the school's reading program teaches phonological, phonemic awareness, and phonics skills.
- If your child is past the ages at which phonemic awareness and phonological skills are taught class-wide (usually kindergarten to first or second grade), make sure he or she is receiving one-on-one or small group instruction in these skills.
- Do activities to help your child build sound skills (make sure they are short and fun; avoid allowing your child to get frustrated):
  - Help your child think of a number of words that start with the /m/ or /ch/ sound, or other beginning sounds.
  - Make up silly sentences with words that begin with the same sound, such as "Nobody was nice to Nancy's neighbor".
  - Play simple rhyming or blending games with your child, such as taking turns coming up with words that rhyme (*go – no*) or blending simple words (/d/, /o/, /g/ = *dog*).
- Read books with rhymes. Teach your child rhymes, short poems, and songs.
- Practice the alphabet by pointing out letters wherever you see them and by reading alphabet books.

- Consider using computer software that focuses on developing phonological and phonemic awareness skills. Many of these programs use colorful graphics and animation that keep young children engaged and motivated.

### **What teachers can do to help at school**

- Learn all about phonemes (there are more than 40 speech sounds that may not be obvious to fluent readers and speakers).
- Make sure the school's reading program and other materials include skill-building in phonemes, especially in kindergarten and first grade (these skills do not come naturally, but must be taught).
- If children are past the age at which phonemic awareness and phonological skill-building are addressed (typically kindergarten through first or second grade), attend to these skills one-on-one or in a small group. Ask your school's reading specialist for help finding a research-based supplemental or intervention program for students in need.
- Identify the precise phoneme awareness task on which you wish to focus and select developmentally appropriate activities for engaging children in the task. Activities should be fun and exciting – play with sounds, don't drill them.
- Make sure your school's reading program and other materials include systematic instruction in phonics.
- Consider teaching phonological and phonemic skills in small groups since students will likely be at different levels of expertise. Remember that some students may need more reinforcement or instruction if they are past the grades at which phonics is addressed by a reading program (first through third grade).

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**Decoding and Phonics:** the ability to apply your knowledge of letter-sound relationships, including knowledge of letter patterns, to correctly pronounce written words. Understanding these relationships gives children the ability to recognize familiar words quickly and to figure out words they haven't seen before. Although children may sometimes figure out some of these relationships on their own, most children benefit from explicit instruction in this area. **Phonics** is one approach to reading instruction that teaches students the principles of letter-sound relationships, how to sound out words, and exceptions to the principles.

### **What the problem looks like**

### **A kid's perspective: What this feels like to me**

Children will usually express their frustration and difficulties in a general way, with statements like "I hate reading!" or "This is stupid!". But if they could, this is how kids might describe how word decoding and phonics difficulties affect their reading:

- I just seem to get stuck when I try to read a lot of the words in this chapter.
- Figuring out the words takes so much of my energy, I can't even think about what it means.
- I don't know how to sound out these words.
- I know my letters and sounds, but I just can't read words on a page.
  
- Click here to find out [what kids can do](#) to help themselves.

### **A parent's perspective: What I see at home**

Here are some clues for parents that a child may have problems with word decoding and phonics:

- She often gets stuck on words when reading. I end up telling her many of the words.
- His reading is very slow because he spends so much time figuring out words.
- She's not able to understand much about what she's read because she's so busy trying to sound out the words.
- It's as if he doesn't know how to put the information together to read words.
- Saying "sound it out" to her just seems to make her more frustrated.
- He guesses at words based on the first letter or two; it's as if he doesn't pay close attention to the print.

### **A teacher's perspective: What I see in the classroom**

Here are some clues for teachers that a student may have problems with word decoding and phonics:

- She has difficulty matching sounds and letters, which can affect reading and spelling.
- She decodes in a very labored manner.
- He has trouble reading and spelling phonetically.
- She has a high degree of difficulty with phonics patterns and activities.
- He guesses at words based on the first letter or two.
- Even though I taught several short vowel sounds (or other letter sounds or patterns), the corresponding letters are not showing up in his writing samples.
- Even though I taught certain letter patterns, she isn't able to recognize them when reading words.

## How to help

With the help of parents and teachers, kids can learn strategies to overcome word decoding and phonics problems that affect their reading. Below are some tips and specific things to do.

### What kids can do to help themselves

- Play with magnetic letters. See how quickly you can put them in alphabetical order while singing the alphabet song.
- Look at written materials around your house and at road signs to see if you can spot familiar words and letter patterns.
- Write notes, e-mails, and letters to your friends and family. Represent each sound you hear as you write.
- When you're trying to sound out a word, pay close attention to the print. Try to look at all the letters in the word, not just the first one or two.

### What parents can do to help at home

- For a younger reader, help your child learn the letters and sounds of the alphabet. Occasionally point to letters and ask your child to name them.
- Help your child make connections between what he or she might see on a sign or in the newspaper and the letter and sound work he or she is doing in school.
- Encourage your child to write and spell notes, e-mails, and letters using what he knows about sounds and letters.
- Talk with your child about the "irregular" words that she'll often see in what she's reading. These are the words that don't follow the usual letter-sound rules. These words include *said*, *are*, and *was*. Students must learn to recognize them "at sight."
- Consider using computer software that focuses on developing phonics and emergent literacy skills. Some software programs are designed to support children in their writing efforts. For example, some programs encourage kids to construct sentences and then cartoon characters will act out the completed sentence. Other software programs provide practice with long and short vowel sounds and creating compound words.

### What teachers can do to help at school

- Have students sort pictures and objects by the sound you're teaching. At each stage, have children say the letter sound over and over again.

- Teach phonics in a systematic and explicit way. If your curriculum materials are not systematic and explicit, talk with your principal or reading specialist.
  - Be sure to begin the systematic and explicit phonics instruction early; first grade would be best.
  - Help students understand the purpose of phonics by engaging them in reading and writing activities that requires them to apply the phonics information you've taught them.
  - Use manipulatives to help teach letter-sound relationships. These can include counters, sound boxes, and magnetic letters.
  - Provide more of your instruction to students who you've divided into need-based groups.
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**Vocabulary** refers to the words we must understand to communicate effectively. Educators often consider four types of vocabulary: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening vocabulary refers to the words we need to know to understand what we hear. Speaking vocabulary consists of the words we use when we speak. Reading vocabulary refers to the words we need to know to understand what we read. Writing vocabulary consists of the words we use in writing.

Vocabulary plays a fundamental role in the reading process, and contributes greatly to a reader's comprehension. A reader cannot understand a text without knowing what most of the words mean. Students learn the meanings of most words indirectly, through everyday experiences with oral and written language. Other words are learned through carefully designed instruction.

### **What the problem looks like**

#### **A kid's perspective: What this feels like to me**

Children will usually express their frustration and difficulties in a general way, with statements like "I hate reading!" or "This is stupid!". But if they could, this is how kids might describe how their vocabulary difficulties affect their reading:

- I heard my friend tell what happened in the movie but I didn't really understand what he said about it.
- I feel like I just use the same words over and over again in my writing.
- I don't like to read on my own because I don't understand lots of the words in the book.

#### **A parent's perspective: What I see at home**

Here are some clues for parents that a child may have difficulties as a result of his or her vocabulary:

- She's unable to tell about her day in a way that makes sense.
- She misuses common words.
- He doesn't link words from a book to similar words from another book or from real life.
- He's often not able to find the right word to describe something.

### **A teacher's perspective: What I see in the classroom**

Here are some clues for teachers that a student may have difficulties as a result of his or her vocabulary:

- She has questions about a lot of word meanings in a grade appropriate text.
- He seems to have a weak vocabulary.
- She is not able to make connections among words in various texts.
- He's often not able to find the right word to describe something.

### **How to help**

With the help of parents and teachers, kids can overcome vocabulary limitations that affect their reading. Below are some tips and specific things to do.

### **What kids can do to help themselves**

- Find books to read on your own. The more you read, the more new words you'll see, and the more you'll learn about the words.
- Look ahead in textbooks to learn new vocabulary and concepts before your teacher goes over the section in class.
- Keep a list of key vocabulary and transition words.
- Practice telling stories using the words *first*, *then*, and *finally*.

### **What parents can do to help at home**

- Engage your child in conversations every day. If possible, include new and interesting words in your conversation.
- Read to your child each day. When the book contains a new or interesting word, pause and define the word for your child. After you're done reading, engage your child in a conversation about the book.
- Help build word knowledge by classifying and grouping objects or pictures while naming them.

- Help build your child's understanding of language by playing verbal games and telling jokes and stories.
- Encourage your child to read on his own. The more children read, the more words they encounter and learn.

### **What teachers can do to help at school**

- Help build language skills in class by playing oral and written word exercises and games.
- Teach students about the important, useful, and difficult vocabulary words before students read the text. This will help them remember the words and improve comprehension.
- Offer students many opportunities to encounter target vocabulary words beyond the context in which they are taught.
- Have students use taught vocabulary words often and in various ways both orally and in writing so they are better able to remember the words and their meanings.
- Teach vocabulary via explicit instruction and also through independent readings.
- Help students learn to use context clues to determine the meanings of words. Teach them that some context clues are more helpful than others and provide examples of helpful and less helpful clues.
- Read to your class each day. When the book contains a new or interesting word, pause and define the word for your students. After you're done reading, engage your students in a conversation about the book.
- Engage your students in conversations every day. If possible, include new and interesting words in your conversation.
- Explicitly teach the meanings of common prefixes, roots, and suffixes.
- Draw students' attention to common roots in a variety of words (for example, the similar roots and meanings of the words *vision*, *visual*, *visible*, *invisible*) and lead a discussion of the meanings of the words and how they tend to be used.

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## **Fluency**

### Target the Problem!

Fluency is defined as the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. In order to understand what they read, children must be able to *read fluently* whether they are reading aloud or silently. When reading aloud, fluent readers read in phrases and add intonation appropriately. Their reading is smooth and has expression.

Children who do not read with fluency sound choppy and awkward. Those students may have difficulty with decoding skills or they may just need more practice with speed and smoothness in reading. Fluency is also important for motivation; children who find reading laborious tend not to want read! As

readers head into upper elementary grades, fluency becomes increasingly important. The volume of reading required in the upper elementary years escalates dramatically. Students whose reading is slow or labored will have trouble meeting the reading demands of their grade level.

### **What the problem looks like**

A kid's perspective: What this feels like to me

Children will usually express their frustration and difficulties in a general way, with statements like "I hate reading!" or "This is stupid!". But if they could, this is how kids might describe how fluency difficulties in particular affect their reading:

- I just seem to get stuck when I try to read a lot of the words in this chapter.
- It takes me so long to read something.
- Reading through this book takes so much of my energy, I can't even think about what it means.

A parent's perspective: What I see at home

Here are some clues for parents that a child may have problems with fluency:

- He knows how to read words but seems to take a long time to read a short book or passage silently.
- She reads a book with no expression.
- He stumbles a lot and loses his place when reading something aloud.
- She reads aloud very slowly.
- She moves her mouth when reading silently (subvocalizing).

A teacher's perspective: What I see in the classroom

Here are some clues for teachers that a student may have problems with fluency:

- Her results on words-correct-per-minute assessments are below grade level or targeted benchmark.
- She has difficulty and grows frustrated when reading aloud, either because of speed or accuracy.
- He does not read aloud with expression; that is, he does not change his tone where appropriate.
- She does not "chunk" words into meaningful units.
- When reading, he doesn't pause at meaningful breaks within sentences or paragraphs.

### How to help

With the help of parents and teachers, kids can learn strategies to cope with fluency issues that affect his or her reading. Below are some tips and specific things to do.

#### What kids can do to help themselves

- Track the words with your finger as a parent or teacher reads a passage aloud. Then you read it.
- Have a parent or teacher read aloud to you. Then, match your voice to theirs.
- Read your favorite books and poems over and over again. Practice getting smoother and reading with expression.

#### What parents can do to help at home

- Support and encourage your child. Realize that he or she is likely frustrated by reading.
- Check with your child's teachers to find out their assessment of your child's word decoding skills.
- If your child can decode words well, help him or her build speed and accuracy by:
  - Reading aloud and having your child match his voice to yours
  - Having your child practice reading the same list of words, phrase, or short passages several times
  - Reminding your child to pause between sentences and phrases
- Read aloud to your child to provide an example of how fluent reading sounds.
- Give your child books with predictable vocabulary and clear rhythmic patterns so the child can "hear" the sound of fluent reading as he or she reads the book aloud.
- Use books on tapes; have the child follow along in the print copy.

#### What teachers can do to help at school

- Assess the student to make sure that word decoding or word recognition is not the source of the difficulty (if decoding is the source of the problem, decoding will need to be addressed in addition to reading speed and phrasing).
- Give the student independent level texts that he or she can practice again and again. Time the student and calculate words-correct-per-minute regularly. The student can chart his or her own improvement.
- Ask the student to match his or her voice to yours when reading aloud or to a tape recorded reading.
- Read a short passage and then have the student immediately read it back to you.

- Have the student practice reading a passage with a certain emotion, such as sadness or excitement, to emphasize expression and intonation.
- Incorporate timed repeated readings into your instructional repertoire.
- Plan lessons that explicitly teach students how to pay attention to clues in the text (for example, punctuation marks) that provide information about how that text should be read.

### **More information**

Recommended links:

- [Fluency Instruction](#) (Partnership for Reading)
- [Effective Fluency Instruction and Progress Monitoring](#) (208K PDF)\*
- [The Role of the SLP in Improving Reading Fluency](#) (American Speech-Language Hearing Association)
- [Printable Oral Ready Fluency Table](#) (Read Naturally, Inc.) (26K PDF)\*

**Comprehension** is the understanding and interpretation of what is read. To be able to accurately understand written material, children need to be able to 1) decode what they read; 2) make connections between what they read and what they already know; and 3) think deeply about what they have read. One big part of comprehension is having a sufficient vocabulary, or knowing the meanings of enough words.

Readers who have strong comprehension are able to draw conclusions about what they read – what is important, what is a fact, what caused an event to happen, which characters are funny. Thus comprehension involves combining reading with thinking and reasoning.

### **What the problem looks like**

#### **A kid's perspective: What this feels like to me**

Children will usually express their frustration and difficulties in a general way, with statements like "I hate reading!" or "This is stupid!". But if they could, this is how kids might describe how comprehension difficulties in particular affect their reading:

- It takes me so long to read something. It's hard to follow along with everything going on.
- I didn't really get what that book was about.
- Why did that character do that? I just don't get it!
- I'm not sure what the most important parts of the book were.
- I couldn't really create an image in my head of what was going on.

**A parent's perspective: What I see at home**

Here are some clues for parents that a child may have problems with comprehension:

- She's not able to summarize a passage or a book.
- He might be able to tell you what happened in a story, but can't explain why events went the way they did.
- She can't explain what a character's thoughts or feelings might have been.
- He doesn't link events in a book to similar events from another book or from real life.

**A teacher's perspective: What I see in the classroom**

Here are some clues for teachers that a student may have problems with comprehension:

- He seems to focus on the "wrong" aspect of a passage; for example, he concentrates so much on the details that the main idea is lost.
- She can tell the outcome of a story, but cannot explain why things turned out that way.
- He does not go behind what is presented in a book to think about what might happen next or why characters took the action they did.
- She brings up irrelevant information when trying to relate a passage to something in her own life.
- He seems to have a weak vocabulary.
- She cannot tell the clear, logical sequence of events in a story.
- He does not pick out the key facts from informational text.
- He cannot give you a "picture" of what's going on in a written passage; for example, what the characters look like or details of where the story takes place.

**How to help**

With the help of parents and teachers, kids can learn strategies to cope with comprehension problems that affect his or her reading. Below are some tips and specific things to do.

**What kids can do to help themselves**

- Use outlines, maps, and notes when you read.
- Make flash cards of key terms you might want to remember.
- Read stories or passages in short sections and make sure you know what happened before you continue reading.
- Ask yourself, "Does this make sense?" If it doesn't, reread the part that didn't make sense.

- Read with a buddy. Stop every page or so and take turns summarizing what you've read.
- Ask a parent or teacher to preview a book with you before you read it on your own.
- As you read, try to form mental pictures or images that match the story.

### **What parents can do to help at home**

- Hold a conversation and discuss what your child has read. Ask your child probing questions about the book and connect the events to his or her own life. For example, say "I wonder why that girl did that?" or "How do you think he felt? Why?" and "So, what lesson can we learn here?".
- Help your child make connections between what he or she reads and similar experiences he has felt, saw in a movie, or read in another book.
- Help your child monitor his or her understanding. Teach her to continually ask herself whether she understands what she's reading.
- Help your child go back to the text to support his or her answers.
- Discuss the meanings of unknown words, both those he reads and those he hears.
- Read material in short sections, making sure your child understands each step of the way.
- Discuss what your child has learned from reading informational text such as a science or social studies book.

### **What teachers can do to help at school**

- As students read, ask them open-ended questions such as "Why did things happen that way?" or "What is the author trying to do here?" and "Why is this somewhat confusing?".
- Teach students the structure of different types of reading material. For instance, narrative texts usually have a problem, a highpoint of action, and a resolution to the problem. Informational texts may describe, compare and contrast, or present a sequence of events.
- Discuss the meaning of words as you go through the text. Target a few words for deeper teaching, really probing what those words mean and how they can be used.
- Teach note-taking skills and summarizing strategies.
- Use graphic organizers that help students break information down and keep track of what they read.
- Encourage students to use and revisit targeted vocabulary words.

- Teach students to monitor their own understanding. Show them how, for example, to ask themselves "What's unclear here?" or "What information am I missing?" and "What else should the author be telling me?".
- Teach children how to make predictions and how to summarize.