

Understanding dyslexia

What it is, how it affects learning, and how extra tutoring can help

A specific learning difficulty (SpLD) · for parents and carers of primary aged children

Dyslexia is a **lifelong difference in how the brain processes the sounds and symbols of language**. It mainly makes it hard to learn to read and spell words accurately and fluently. Around **1 in 10** people are dyslexic to some degree, and it often runs in families. Dyslexia has **nothing to do with intelligence** or effort, and it is not caused by poor teaching. It sits on a continuum, from mild to severe, rather than being something a child simply has or does not have.

What sits underneath

Sounds in words

Difficulty hearing and juggling the separate sounds in words, which is the foundation of phonics.

Working memory

Holding information in mind while using it, such as a sentence while writing it, or the start of an instruction.

Speed of recall

Slower at pulling up letter sounds, words and facts, so reading takes far more effort.

Sequences

Days of the week, months, times tables and the order of letters in a word can be slow to stick.

How it can show at school

- Phonics taking much longer to click than for classmates.
- Reading slowly and guessing words from the first letter or the picture.
- Spelling the same word several different ways in one piece of work.
- Strong spoken ideas that do not make it onto paper.
- Tiredness, avoidance or upset around reading and writing.
- Slow copying from the board, or losing their place on the page.
- Earlier difficulty with rhymes, letter names or the alphabet.

Common myths

“Dyslexic children see letters backwards.” Most young children reverse letters; dyslexia is about sounds and memory, not eyesight.

“They will grow out of it.” Dyslexia is lifelong, but the right teaching makes a big difference, and the earlier the better.

“Coloured overlays fix it.” Some children find them more comfortable, but they do not treat dyslexia.

Strengths worth noticing

Many dyslexic children are creative, curious and good at big picture thinking, problem solving, talking and building things.

Often found alongside

Dyscalculia, dyspraxia, ADHD and speech and language difficulties (see our other sheets).

A note on screening

Phonics checks and school screeners can flag a risk of dyslexia, but they are not a diagnosis. A child who is struggling should get help straight away rather than wait to see.

“Every child learns, some just need a different path.”

Nicola, Moss Grove Tutoring

Why one to one makes a difference

Dyslexic children usually need **more teaching, more practice and more time** than a class can give. One to one, Nicola can find exactly where the gaps are, start from there and move on only when each step is secure.

What sessions look like

- **Structured phonics:** one sound or pattern at a time, in a clear order, building on what is known.
- **Multisensory:** seeing, saying, hearing and writing together, with letter tiles and movement.
- **Overlearning:** lots of short, varied practice so that skills become automatic.
- **Reading fluency:** rereading familiar text to build speed and confidence.
- **Spelling patterns and memory tricks** rather than long lists to learn by rote.
- **Getting ideas down:** planning frames, talking it through first, and technology where it helps.

A typical session

Warm up: quick review of sounds and words already learned.

New learning: one new sound or spelling pattern, taught multisensorily.

Reading: a short text that practises the new pattern.

Writing: using it in words and sentences.

Finish: a game, and a look at progress made.

Confidence matters as much as skills

By the time dyslexia is spotted many children believe they are not clever. Sessions are built so that success comes early, and progress is shown to your child so they can see it.

Working together

You know your child best. Before starting, Nicola will ask what has happened so far, what helps and what makes things worse. A short update follows each session, and with your permission she can link with your child's teacher or SENCo so that everyone is working to the same plan.

Being realistic

Tutoring does not cure dyslexia, and progress takes months rather than weeks. Regular sessions, practice in between and support at school together make the biggest difference.

Small things that help at home

- Read **to** your child and share audiobooks, so a love of stories is not held back by reading level.
- Keep reading practice short, daily and calm: ten minutes beats an hour.
- Praise effort and strategies, not just correct answers.
- Play word and rhyme games, and use songs for sequences such as the months.
- Let them use spoken answers, mind maps or a keyboard where it helps.

If you are looking for a diagnosis

Talk to your child's school SENCo first. A full diagnostic assessment is carried out by a specialist teacher with an assessment practising certificate or by an educational psychologist, and privately it usually costs several hundred pounds. **Your child does not need a diagnosis to receive SEN support at school.**

Where to find out more

British Dyslexia Association: bdadyslexia.org.uk

Made By Dyslexia: madebydyslexia.org

SENDIASS: free, impartial advice on SEN support in school. Search "SENDIASS" with Gloucestershire or Herefordshire.

About Nicola

Nicola has worked in primary schools since 2003 and has been a Higher Level Teaching Assistant since 2008, specialising in special educational needs, including running nurture groups.