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Unpacking Dyslexia

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In recent years, the collaborative movement in education has changed reading intervention. While schools have different approaches, the speech-language pathologist plays an important role in the diagnosis of dyslexia, development of appropriate goals, and delivery of effective reading instruction and intervention. Today, it is vital that the speech-language pathologist understands dyslexia and the function of the SLP as a member of the literacy team.

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability that affects as many as one in five children. It is characterized by difficulties with word recognition, spelling, and decoding. These difficulties are usually due to weaknesses in the phonological components of language resulting in an inability to read printed words. These challenges significantly impact reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, and overall academic achievement.



Common Characteristics of Dyslexia

The hallmark characteristic of dyslexia is the inability to read printed words even with appropriate instruction. The most common difficulties exhibited by children with dyslexia include:



- learning to speak; learning letters and their sounds
- word retrieval or naming
- phonological awareness (rhyming, counting syllables, manipulating and distinguishing sounds)
- organizing written and spoken language
- spelling and reading comprehension

Additional difficulties that may be present include proofreading and copying, poor or slow handwriting, memorizing and retrieving math facts, and doing math operations correctly.

Common Misconceptions About Dyslexia



- People with dyslexia “read backwards.” Reversing letters isn’t always a sign of dyslexia.
- Dyslexia only affects boys. Dyslexia affects both genders nearly equally.
- Dyslexia is a sign of low IQ. Dyslexia is not due to lack of intelligence. It occurs in people of all backgrounds and intelligence levels.
- Dyslexia is curable. Dyslexia is a brain-based condition with life-long challenges but early intervention and classroom accommodations can positively impact reading ability and academic success.

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Diagnosis

Early assessment is crucial in diagnosing and determining effective instruction for children who struggle with reading. A dynamic evaluation includes:



- oral language skills
- word recognition
- reading comprehension
- phonological awareness
- background information
- vocabulary knowledge
- decoding
- spelling
- naming speed

Intervention

Structured literacy instruction provides effective intervention. It not only helps students with dyslexia, but it has also been shown as effective instruction for all readers. Structured literacy instruction includes:



- phonological awareness
- sound-symbol association
- syllable instruction
- base words, roots, prefixes and suffixes
- grammar
- vocabulary

Role of the SLP

A collaborative literacy team provides the best intervention for dyslexia and the speech-language pathologist is an integral part of that team. The speech-language pathologist has extensive knowledge of phonological processing, language development, comprehension, screening, assessment, and treatment. This knowledge base allows the SLP to play a crucial role in:

- fostering language development and early literacy skills
- identifying children at risk for reading and writing problems
- assessing reading and writing
- providing intervention and documentation for reading and writing
- providing assistance to general education teachers, parents, and students
- advocating for effective literacy practices

The shift toward collaborative curriculum-based approaches in education requires the SLP to be knowledgeable about dyslexia and the vital role the SLP plays in providing successful literacy intervention.



Resources:

- <https://dyslexiaida.org/>
- http://www.asha.org/Events/convention/handouts/2008/1615_Hogan_Tiffany
- <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/LBLD.htm>
- <http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/parents/living-with-dyslexia/school/classroom/role-speech-language-pathologist>
- <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/common-myths-about-dyslexia-readingissues>
- <http://dyslexia.yale.edu/Myths.html>

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