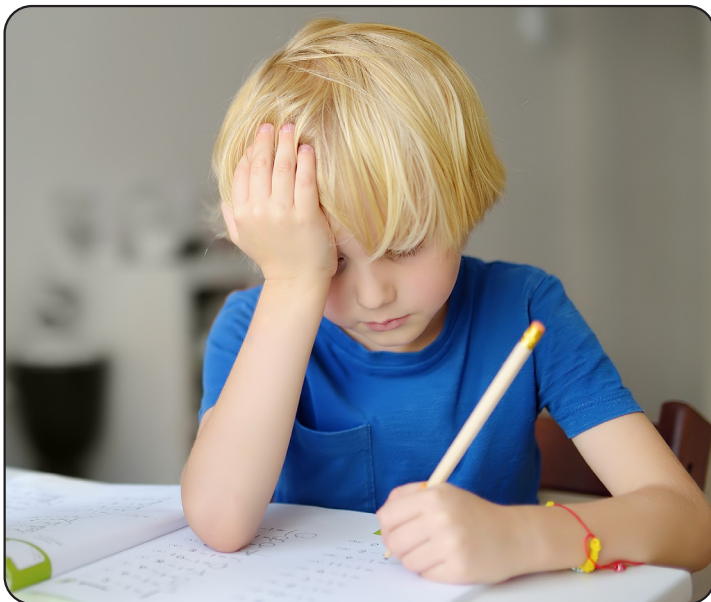#147

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Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

How to Assist a Student with Dysgraphia in the Classroom

By Lindsay Knobelauch, M.Ed., CCC-SLP

Writing is a hard task for many students. Students with poor handwriting and difficulty expressing themselves through writing may have a learning disability called dysgraphia. These students may avoid writing tasks or become frustrated during writing activities. They also have trouble writing clearly because they don't understand the information as they put it on the page. Students with poor handwriting may have inconsistent spacing between letters and words, inconsistent letter formation, and/or a mixture of lowercase and uppercase letters. Students with dysgraphia may become overwhelmed with the writing process.

Diagnosis

There is no specific test for dysgraphia, but the school psychologist can test students you suspect of having dysgraphia using a number of different assessments. There are two types of dysgraphia, specific and non-specific, and several classifications. The assessments listed below can help professionals pinpoint which type and classification of dysgraphia the student may have. Once teachers have this information, they can make appropriate accommodations and modifications to help the student during writing activities.

- Processing Speed Index scores from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children
- Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration (BEERY™ VMI)
- Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt Test
- Jordan Left-Right Reversal Test
- Trail Making Tests from the Halstead-Reitan Neuropsychological Battery

Signs and Symptoms

Simply having poor handwriting does not mean that your student has a diagnosis of dysgraphia. Along with poor handwriting, additional signs and symptoms of dysgraphia include:

- Cramped or awkward pencil grip and body position.
- Mixing printed and cursive letters within the same word.
- Mixing lower- and uppercase letters within the same word.
- Difficulty with syntax (forming sentences or phrases) and grammar (using rules to write sentences).
- Difficulty thinking and writing at the same time.
- Unfinished or omitted words.

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(cont.)

Accomodations

There are many ways to help a student with dysgraphia in your classroom. Below is a list of accommodations, modifications, and techniques to assist the student with dysgraphia.

• Be patient and positive when practicing handwriting.

• Encourage proper grip, posture, and paper positioning.

• Allow the use of a word processor.

• Use oral exams and allow students to dictate assignments to a scribe.

• Avoid criticisms for sloppiness or illegibility.

• Provide additional time for writing tasks.

• Use writing paper with raised lines.

• Allow students to use a line width that is most comfortable for them.

• Reduce the amount of copying needed to complete an assignment.

• Encourage the use of visual organizers to assist in outlining and brainstorming for extended writing assignments.

• Encourage the student to use hand exercises when he/she becomes fatigued.

• Have students complete writing activities in small steps.

Related Handy Handouts®:

517 –Dysgraphia

159 –Classroom Tips to Improve Handwriting

148 –Tips for Parents to Improve a Child's Writing Skills

Resources

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National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2007). Dysgraphia. Retrieved December 21, 2007, from http://www.ncld.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=468

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