**Dyslexia**

**Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty that can cause problems with reading, writing and spelling.**

It's a specific learning difficulty, which means it causes problems with certain abilities used for learning, such as reading and writing.

Unlike a [learning disability](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/learning-disabilities/), intelligence isn't affected.

It's estimated up to 1 in every 10 people in the UK has some degree of dyslexia.

Dyslexia is a lifelong problem that can present challenges on a daily basis, but support is available to improve reading and writing skills and help those with the problem be successful at school and work.

**What are the signs of dyslexia?**

Signs of dyslexia usually become apparent when a child starts school and begins to focus more on learning how to read and write.

A person with dyslexia may:

* read and write very slowly
* confuse the order of letters in words
* put letters the wrong way round (such as writing "b" instead of "d")
* have poor or inconsistent spelling
* understand information when told verbally, but have difficulty with information that's written down
* find it hard to carry out a sequence of directions
* struggle with planning and organisation

But people with dyslexia often have good skills in other areas, such as creative thinking and problem solving.

Read more about the [symptoms of dyslexia](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dyslexia/symptoms/).

**Getting help**

If you think your child may have dyslexia, the first step is to speak to their teacher or their school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) about your concerns.

They may be able to offer additional support to help your child if necessary.

If your child continues to have problems despite extra support, you or the school may want to consider requesting a more in-depth assessment from a specialist dyslexia teacher or an educational psychologist.

This can be arranged through the school, or you can request a private assessment by contacting:

* an educational psychologist directly (you can find a [directory of chartered psychologists](http://www.bps.org.uk/bpslegacy/dcp) on the British Psychological Society's website)
* a voluntary organisation that can arrange an assessment, such as a [local dyslexia association](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/membership/local-dyslexia-associations/lda-directory)

Adults who wish to be assessed for dyslexia should contact a local or national dyslexia association for advice.

Read more about [how dyslexia is diagnosed](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dyslexia/diagnosis/).

**Support for people with dyslexia**

If your child has dyslexia, they'll probably need extra educational support from their school.

With appropriate support, there's usually no reason your child can't go to a mainstream school, although a small number of children may benefit from attending a specialist school.

Techniques and support that may help your child include:

* occasional 1-to-1 teaching or lessons in a small group with a specialist teacher
* phonics (a special learning technique that focuses on improving the ability to identify and process the smaller sounds that make up words)
* technology like computers and speech recognition software that may make it easier for your child to read and write when they're a bit older

Universities also have specialist staff who can support young people with dyslexia in higher education.

Technology such as word processors and electronic organisers can be useful for adults, too.

Employers are required to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace to help people with dyslexia, such as allowing extra time for certain tasks.

Read more about [how dyslexia is managed](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dyslexia/living-with/).

**Support groups**

As well as national dyslexia charities such as the [British Dyslexia Association (BDA)](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/), there are several [local dyslexia associations (LDAs)](https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/membership/local-dyslexia-associations/lda-directory).

These are independently registered charities that run workshops and help to provide local support and access to information.

**What causes dyslexia?**

People with dyslexia find it difficult to recognise the different sounds that make up words and relate these to letters.

Dyslexia isn't related to a person's general level of intelligence. Children and adults of all intellectual abilities can be affected by dyslexia.

The exact cause of dyslexia is unknown, but it often appears to run in families.

It's thought certain genes inherited from your parents may act together in a way that affects how some parts of the brain develop during early life.

# Symptoms - Dyslexia

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**The signs and symptoms of dyslexia differ from person to person. Each individual with the condition will have a unique pattern of strengths and weaknesses.**

Some of the most common signs of dyslexia are outlined below.

## Pre-school children

In some cases, it's possible to detect symptoms of dyslexia before a child starts school.

Symptoms can include:

* delayed speech development compared with other children of the same age (although this can have many different causes)
* speech problems, such as not being able to pronounce long words properly and "jumbling" up phrases (for example, saying "hecilopter" instead of "helicopter", or "beddy tear" instead of "teddy bear")
* problems expressing themselves using spoken language, such as being unable to remember the right word to use, or putting sentences together incorrectly
* little understanding or appreciation of rhyming words, such as "the cat sat on the mat", or nursery rhymes
* difficulty with, or little interest in, learning letters of the alphabet

## Schoolchildren

Symptoms of dyslexia usually become more obvious when children start school and begin to focus more on learning how to read and write.

Symptoms of dyslexia in children aged 5 to 12 include:

* problems learning the names and sounds of letters
* spelling that's unpredictable and inconsistent
* putting letters and figures the wrong way round (such as writing "6" instead of "9", or "b" instead of "d")
* confusing the order of letters in words
* reading slowly or making errors when reading aloud
* visual disturbances when reading (for example, a child may describe letters and words as seeming to move around or appear blurred)
* answering questions well orally, but having difficulty writing the answer down
* difficulty carrying out a sequence of directions
* struggling to learn sequences, such as days of the week or the alphabet
* slow writing speed
* poor handwriting
* problems copying written language and taking longer than normal to complete written work
* poor phonological awareness and word attack skills

### Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognise that words are made up of smaller units of sound (phonemes) and that changing and manipulating phonemes can create new words and meanings.

A child with poor phonological awareness may not be able to correctly answer these questions:

* What sounds do you think make up the word "hot", and are these different from the sounds that make up the word "hat"?
* What word would you have if you changed the "p" sound in "pot" to an "h" sound?
* How many words can you think of that rhyme with the word "cat"?

### Word attack skills

Young children with dyslexia can also have problems with word attack skills.

This is the ability to make sense of unfamiliar words by looking for smaller words or collections of letters that a child has previously learnt.

For example, a child with good word attack skills may read the word "sunbathing" for the first time and gain a sense of the meaning of the word by breaking it down into "sun", "bath", and "ing".

## Teenagers and adults

As well as the problems mentioned above, the symptoms of dyslexia in older children and adults can include:

* poorly organised written work that lacks expression (for example, even though they may be very knowledgeable about a certain subject, they may have problems expressing that knowledge in writing)
* difficulty planning and writing essays, letters or reports
* difficulties revising for examinations
* trying to avoid reading and writing whenever possible
* difficulty taking notes or copying
* poor spelling
* struggling to remember things such as a PIN or telephone number
* struggling to meet deadlines

## Getting help

If you're concerned about your child's progress with reading and writing, first talk to their teacher.

If you or your child's teacher has an ongoing concern, take your child to see your GP so they can check for signs of any underlying health issues, such as hearing or vision problems, that could be affecting their ability to learn.

If your child doesn't have any obvious underlying health problems to explain their learning difficulties, different teaching methods may need to be tried.

You may also want to request an assessment to identify any special needs they may have.

If you're an adult and think you may have dyslexia, you may want to arrange a dyslexia assessment through your [local dyslexia association](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/membership/local-dyslexia-associations/lda-directory).

Read more about [diagnosing dyslexia](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dyslexia/diagnosis/).

## Associated problems

Some people with dyslexia also have other problems not directly connected to reading or writing.

These include:

* difficulties with numbers (dyscalculia)
* poor short-term memory
* problems concentrating and a short attention span, including [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/)
* poor organisation and time management
* physical co-ordination problems ([developmental co-ordination disorder](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Dyspraxia-%28childhood%29/Pages/Introduction.aspx), also called DCD or dyspraxia)

**Diagnosis**

## If you're worried about your child

If you're concerned about your child's progress with reading and writing, first talk to their teacher. You may also want to meet with other staff in the school.

If there's an ongoing concern, take your child to see a GP. It may be that your child has health problems that are affecting their ability to read or write.

For example, they may have:

* vision problems, such as [short-sightedness](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/short-sightedness/) or a [squint](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/squint/)
* hearing problems as the result of a condition such as [glue ear](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/glue-ear/)
* other conditions, such as [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/)

If your child does not have any obvious underlying health problems to explain their learning difficulties, it may be that they're not responding very well to the teaching method and a different approach may be needed.

Read about [managing dyslexia](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dyslexia/living-with/) for more information about educational interventions that may help.

## Dyslexia assessments

If there are still concerns about your child's progress after they have received additional teaching and support, it may be a good idea to have a more in-depth assessment.

This can be carried out by an educational psychologist or an appropriately qualified specialist dyslexia teacher.

They'll be able to support you, your child and your child's teachers by helping improve the understanding of your child's learning difficulties and suggesting interventions that may help them.

### Requesting an assessment

There are various ways to request an assessment for your child, although it can sometimes be a time consuming and frustrating process.

The first step is to meet your child's teacher and their school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) to discuss your concerns and any interventions that have been tried already.

If your child continues to have difficulties despite interventions, you can ask for them to be referred for assessment by a local authority educational psychologist or another specialist in dyslexia.

Or you can approach an independent educational psychologist or another suitably qualified professional directly.

You can find a [directory of chartered psychologists](https://www.bps.org.uk/lists/DIR) on the British Psychological Society's website.

You can also contact a national or local dyslexia association for help arranging an assessment.

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) has [more information about assessments for children and adults](https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/services/assessments).

### The assessment procedure

Before the assessment takes place, you and your child's school may be sent a questionnaire that asks about your child and related issues, such as:

* the general state of their health
* how well they perform certain tasks
* what you think needs to change

The asskkessment itself may involve observing your child in their learning environment, talking with key adults involved with your child's learning, and asking your child to take part in a series of tests.

These tests may examine your child's:

* reading and writing abilities
* language development and vocabulary
* logical reasoning
* memory
* the speed they can process visual and auditory (sound) information
* organisational skills
* approaches to learning

### What happens afterwards

After your child has been assessed, you'll receive a report that outlines their strengths and weaknesses, with recommendations of what could be done to improve areas they're having difficulties with.

Depending on the severity of your child's learning difficulties, it may be possible for their difficulties to be managed through [special educational needs (SEN) support](https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/special-educational-needs-support), an action plan drawn up by their school and their parents.

SEN support replaces the individual education plan (IEP), but some schools may still use IEPs.

In a small number of cases where a child's difficulties do not improve and progress does not seem to be made, you may want to request a fuller assessment that covers all aspects of your child's development.

This would result in a more formal educational plan being drawn up for your child, known as an education healthcare plan (EHC).

This sets out what your child's educational needs are and the support required to meet those needs in a document that's reviewed formally every year.