

# What Is Dyslexia?

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*For the dyslexic, reading is a challenge, not a pleasure.*

As the Diagnostic Coordinator at our Guthrie Scottish Rite Childhood Language Clinic, I often am asked to explain dyslexia. It is not an easy question to answer because dyslexia is surrounded by a great deal of misunderstanding. At our clinic, we actually refrain from using this label because of the confusion associated with it. Often, a layperson's definition of dyslexia involves letter reversals, such as confusions between the letters b and d. However, letter reversals are developmentally normal through the second grade. Mirror writing, an extension of letter reversing, may be exhibited by some individuals with dyslexia, but is not the defining component of it.



Despite the confusion associated with the label, it is very important to understand dyslexia because it is the most common cause of difficulties with spelling, reading, and writing. A very basic definition of dyslexia is an "inability to read with the presence of a normal IQ." Dyslexia is a language-based disorder. In other words, it is a disorder that interferes with the acquisition and processing of language, both oral and written. According to the International Dyslexia Association, "individuals with dyslexia process information in a different area of the brain than do non-dyslexics." Reading difficulties are manifested in an individual's ability to understand (receptive language) and his ability to communicate his wants, needs, and desires (expressive language). Language skills such as phonological processing, reading, writing, spelling, and sometimes arithmetic are affected.

**Common Signs of Dyslexia  
in Children in K to 4th Grade**

- ❖ Slow to learn connection between letters and sounds
- ❖ Difficulty with phonics
- ❖ Difficulty reading single words
- ❖ Confuses small words such as *at* for *to* and *said* for *and*
- ❖ Difficulty with new vocabulary
- ❖ Trouble remembering facts
- ❖ Slow to learn new skills; relies heavily on memorizing without understanding
- ❖ Difficulty planning, organizing, and managing time
- ❖ Poor fine motor coordination; often uses awkward pencil grip



Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with reading single words as a result of insufficient phonological processing abilities. These abilities are the skills that allow a child to play with a language, such as rhyming, to break a sentence into words or words into individual sounds, and to be flexible with the alphabet. Even as early as the preschool years, phonological difficulties provide a significant indicator of later reading difficulties because they are critical to the development of reading.

An inability to decode/encode (read/spell) at the single-word level creates a ripple effect that impairs reading comprehension, written expression, and reading fluency (reading rate and reading accuracy). I often tell parents that their child learns to read up until the third grade and after that he is reading to

learn. While language skills are important in the acquisition of reading in the primary grades, poor reading can affect acquisition of higher language skills in upper elementary grades.

Dyslexia can have a familial history. We often evaluate children at our clinic whose parents have a history of similar problems. Parents often worry that their child will struggle in school as they did.

Finally, dyslexia is not an illness that can be "cured." With proper diagnosis, appropriate intervention, hard work, and support from family and educators, an individual with dyslexia can learn to read and comprehend. Dyslexia is a lifelong condition, which affects so many aspects of life. Our culture relies on reading and language skills for communication in everything we do. Thankfully, the Scottish Rite is addressing the problem of dyslexia, which affects about 10% of children and adults, as well as striving through the RiteCare Childhood Language Program to remedy a host of other learning, language, speech and hearing differences. Together, we can benefit many thousands of America's children in the 21st Century!

**Famous People Affected By Dyslexia**

**Albert Einstein (scientist) • Alexander Graham Bell (inventor) • Walt Disney (artist & author) • Harry Belafonte (performer) • Cher (performer) • Tom Cruise (performer) • Quentin Tarantino (film director) • Hans Christian Anderson (author) • Nelson Rockefeller (financier) • Gen. George Patton (soldier)**

For more information about dyslexia, please visit the International Dyslexia Association web site at <http://www.interdys.org>.