

< Dyslexia

8 tips for introducing dyslexia to your child



By Lexi Walters Wright



Some kids are aware that they read and write differently than other kids before they even hear the word **dyslexia**. But they don't know why, or how it may affect their future. Here's how to explain.

1. Choose the right setting for your talk.

Why: It's best to bring up your child's reading and writing challenges during a peaceful moment. Ideally, this is in a neutral place as well. Your child might be more receptive during a quiet weekend walk together than while you're supervising homework time or helping with a book report.

What to say: "Your report card came today. Let's get ice cream to celebrate how well you're doing in art and math, and how hard you work in all your other classes. I know language arts is still a tough subject. Let's talk a little about that on the drive over."

2. Explain what dyslexia means.

Why: Kids with dyslexia deserve to know that it may present challenges. But they also need to know that they're just as smart as their classmates who don't have it. And **they're not alone**.

What to say: "I know you really struggle with reading sometimes. It seems that the words just don't make sense. This difficulty is called dyslexia – a big word to explain why some kids and adults find it hard to learn to read, write and spell."

"You're just as smart as other kids. Your brain just works a

little differently. But a lot of kids also have trouble reading. And dyslexia doesn't keep you from being great at other things — like being a science star and an awesome goalie.”

3. Use clear and accurate language.

Why: Specific words can help make this “thing” causing your child’s reading and writing issues feel more defined and manageable.

What to say: “You may hear the word *dyslexia* at school or at the doctor’s office. Now that we know dyslexia is causing your reading challenges, we can use that word, too. Soon we’ll start working with your teachers to create what’s called an Individualized Education Program, or **IEP** for short. It will list your goals for reading and writing this year, how to reach them and how your teachers are going to help.”

4. Explain how the school will help.

Why: Children with dyslexia may worry that their teachers think they’re not trying. They need to know that the school understands their challenges — and has ways to help.

What to say: “I know some of your classes can feel really hard because there’s so much reading. But schools are finding better ways to teach smart students like you all the time.”

“Your teachers are committed to helping you succeed and they’re specially trained, so they know how to do it. We’re going to have some meetings with them. You’ll be invited, too. This way you can see how we’ll all work together, and you’ll have a say in the plan.”

5. You're there for your child. Make sure that message is clear.

Why: Kids with dyslexia may wonder whether we realize how it **affects their everyday lives**. Offer understanding and support — all the time.

What to say: “I know that your dyslexia affects all kinds of things, like reading the menu at the diner or learning the rules of a new board game. I’m so proud that you’re interested in learning even though dyslexia makes that trickier. I’ll always make sure you get the help you need — at school, here at home, and out in the community.”

6. Discuss sibling relationships.

Why: Because kids with dyslexia may receive extra attention from adults, they sometimes worry about how their brothers or sisters view them. Let your child know that you’ll make sure your other kids don’t feel slighted.

What to say: “Your sister sees how hard you’re trying to learn to read. She knows I need to spend a little more time with you on homework. I’d do the same for her if she needed extra help. I’ll make sure she understands that.”

7. Offer guidance on how to talk to friends.

Why: While classmates may be familiar with your child’s learning differences, friends from outside school probably aren’t. When your child feels like it’s time to discuss it with other kids, make it clear that you’re there to help figure out the best way to have those talks.

What to say: “It’s up to you whether you want to talk about your dyslexia with people. If you don’t feel comfortable getting into a deeper discussion with someone, you can always say, ‘It’s not that I can’t learn to read. I just need to learn in a very different way.’”

8. Reassure your child about the future.

Why: Kids need a safe place to raise any concerns about growing up with dyslexia. Is your child thinking about college, work, and other options **after high school**? If you’re not sure, it’s OK to ask. Let your child know that a full adult life is most definitely what’s ahead.

What to say: “It’s totally normal to wonder how dyslexia may affect what you’ll do when you’re an adult. I believe you’ll have lots of opportunities to do what you love. Your trouble with reading and writing won’t disappear, but with determination and hard work, I’m confident you can achieve your dreams.”

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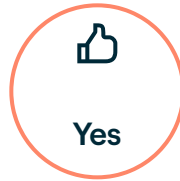
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Reviewed by



Mark J. Griffin, PhD was the founding headmaster of Eagle Hill School, a school for children with specific learning disabilities.

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