

# DYSLEXIA AND THE FAMILY

## CONTENTS

Supporting and advocating for your dyslexic child

How can I help my child at home?

Dyslexia at school

Know your child's legal rights

Is my child's classroom dyslexia aware?

Does my child need a formal assessment?

Reading and phonics

Working with your school

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## Supporting and advocating for your dyslexic child

Dyslexia is a neurodiversity, where the brain is wired differently. Other neurodiversities include dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, autism spectrum and attention deficit hyperactivity.

Learning that your child has dyslexia can be very challenging. But the label can also be liberating. Suddenly your child is no longer just the struggling kid in the class. Rather, they have a learning difference – or preferred way of learning – that can be dealt with constructively.

The concept of preference is about recognizing that dyslexic individuals think differently, receiving and retrieving information in a different part of the brain to neurotypical, word-based thinkers. They tend to think in pictures rather than words. And often prefer to receive and present orally or visually rather than via the written word.

This booklet offers advice on how you can support your child to achieve, both in the home and at school. This advice is based on a philosophy of 'notice and adjust' – a common-sense approach that is about noticing children

who are getting stuck and making adjustments to help. Our focus is action that makes a difference right here, right now; drawing on the huge body of research and experiential evidence on dyslexia.

Dyslexia does not just affect reading and writing – it can impact auditory and visual perception, planning and organising, motor skills, short term memory and concentration. On the upside, dyslexia can deliver powerful creativity and the kind of 'out-of-the-box' thinking that is becoming increasingly important in an IT led world. This can be a real positive when children have support from their family to achieve their full potential. A mind shift from viewing dyslexia as a deficit to seeing it as a potential asset can be empowering.



# How can I help my child at home?

Understanding that dyslexia is a learning preference – a way of thinking - and helping them to adjust to this, is paramount to their long-term success and managing self-esteem.

## Quick tips:

- Keep instructions short and clear – ask them if they have a mental picture of what you have asked them to do.
- Use visual lists for tasks and timetables
- Help your child identify their strengths – what is it they like doing or spend the most time doing? Encourage them to have interests and hobbies outside of the school and learning environment.
- Encourage a love of stories and books by reading to them and using audio books. Encourage learning using podcasts and documentaries on subjects of interests.
- Technology is your child's friend – help them set up and use speech to text and text to speech apps – there are free and paid versions of these apps available. Most phones will have a built in version.
- Getting their ideas out and onto paper is more important than focussing on correct spelling and grammar. These can be edited later if necessary.

## Some reading and resources we recommend

The Wobbly Kids – by Jenny Tebbutt  
[www.raisingachievement.com.au](http://www.raisingachievement.com.au)

Jenny also runs Webinars for parents to help advocate for their children.

This is Dyslexia by Kate Griggs  
Extraordinary People by Kate Griggs  
Made by Dyslexia  
[www.madebydyslexia.org.uk](http://www.madebydyslexia.org.uk)

And you are always welcome to contact the DFNZ for further support and information:  
[info@dfnz.org.nz](mailto:info@dfnz.org.nz)

dyslexia is  
real!

## Dyslexia at school

Typically it is within the school environment that a child's dyslexia first becomes transparent. Traditional teaching practices focus heavily on developing literacy and numeracy skills, which are often the basic skills that children with a learning difference, or preference, find difficult to acquire.

Children start school full of curiosity and eagerness to learn but, for the one in ten New Zealand schoolchildren with dyslexia, this can quickly turn to frustration and stress when unexpected difficulties arise. Overall, dyslexia's greatest difficulty is self-esteem; it only becomes a disability if not appropriately addressed.

In some cases, a child might display a mild form of dyslexia that is only evident at home, for example during homework time. Or they might be hiding their learning issues by using their intelligence and natural abilities to create effective classroom coping strategies. Either way, when a child doesn't seem to be making the same progress as others at school or finds school harder than it should be, they need our help and support. As a parent, it is important that you are able to advocate for your child to ensure their needs are met.



# Know your child's legal rights

New Zealand's education system must provide every young New Zealander with the opportunities they need to reach their potential - that's the law. Under New Zealand and international law, equality of educational opportunity means that a school must identify and remove barriers to achievement.

In New Zealand, the Education Act 1989 REQUIRES school boards to enrol students in their schools irrespective of the students' needs or abilities. Schools MUST identify students with special education needs. They are REQUIRED to develop teaching and learning strategies to meet their needs.

## *It's that simple.*

Students should, as a result of their rights being met, feel confident, feel like they belong, enjoy school, want to go to school, have friends, have a say in what goes on for them, feel challenged at school, and feel proud of the things they have learned and achieved.

Your child has these rights – your child has the right to be dyslexic. Because the education system does not always recognise and respond automatically to this right, dyslexic students may require strong advocacy by parents and others who wish to see them succeed and reach their potential.



# Working as a partnership is critical Student | Parent | Teacher

Where it is in the students' educational best interest:

## **Students have the right NOT to:**

- be tested
- be timed
- be humiliated because of their difference
- read aloud in class
- show what they know [assessment] only through written work
- do homework
- present their writing to the class

## **Students HAVE the right to:**

- be dyslexic
- participate in decision-making
- make mistakes
- the necessary amount of time to process the information / situation
- be respected and valued for their strengths
- classroom adjustments that allow greater access to learning
- special Assessment Conditions to level the playing field, like extra time, a reader, a writer, use of a computer, or a quiet space to be listened to, and their needs met and supported

- explicit teaching
- access the curriculum in ways that best suit their learning profile
- an Individual Education Programme [IEP]

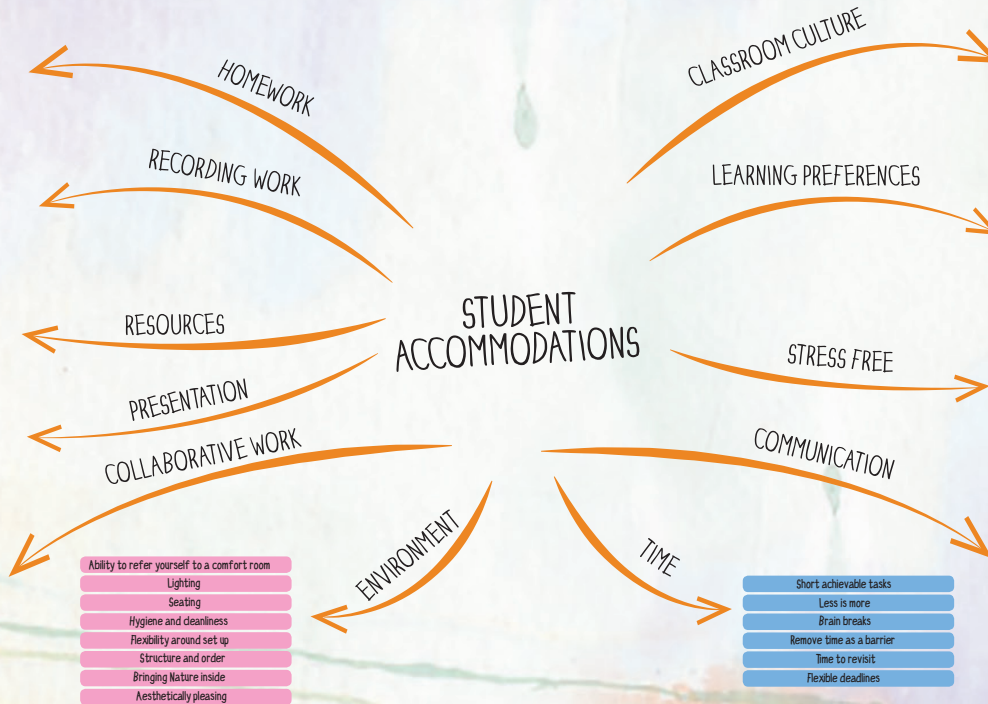
## **Teachers and schools HAVE permission to:**

- identify students who learn differently and take all necessary action to support & allow participation
- meet with and talk openly to students, parents and caregivers
- make changes to the way the classroom environment is set up
- make changes to the way that they present lessons
- allow alternatives to writing, like mind maps and audio / video recordings, to be used as forms of learning evidence and participation
- give extra time or remove time as a barrier
- let their students give them feedback
- teach part of the curriculum well, rather than the whole curriculum poorly
- seek more funds from the Ministry to allow students' rights to be met

There are no barriers to making the necessary changes other than a willingness to do so – attitude is everything.

# IS MY CHILD'S CLASSROOM DYSLEXIA AWARE?

- No Homework as an option
- Stress free and meaningful
- Personalised or differentiated
- Related to prior knowledge
- Flip the classroom
- Offer alternatives to writing
- Routine (set days) timetable
- Clear instructions
- Time driven NOT task driven
- Paste information into book
- Make photocopies available
- Audio, video or photographs
- Minimise copying from board
- Encourage mindmaps, flowcharts etc
- Non traditional assessment
- Colour coded
- Visual timetables
- Well labeled
- Familiar and consistent layout
- Easily Accessible
- Bring your own device (BYOD)
- ICT available
- Print on pastel shades
- Use bold to highlight
- Create lots of space
- Plain font of suitable size
- Bullet point key info
- Thin notes
- Peer marking
- Peer tutoring
- Inquiry learning
- Flexible grouping
- Paired reading
- Scribed work



- Calm and positive ethos
- Have a go culture
- Free to make mistakes
- Stress free comfortable learning
- Flexible groupings
- Good transition process
- Group by thinking not just by basic skills
- Consistent approaches to behavior management
- Everybody counts
- Let the students teach
- Foster success through learning preferences
- Alternative ways of recording
- Opportunities to present alternative evidence of learning
- Adapt tasks to suit
- Use multi-sensory techniques
- Provide challenge but with accommodations
- Embed differentiation in the classroom
- Ability appropriate task
- Time to think
- Give control and responsibility
- Encourage student voice
- Free to make mistakes
- The right to pass - e.g., don't read aloud
- Encourage self-advocacy
- Remove time as a barrier
- Mark content not spelling
- Model all learning tasks
- Take account of diverse backgrounds
- Write instructions down and leave them
- Appropriate vocabulary
- Visual prompts
- Chunk learning
- Clear and explicit instructions
- Reduce teacher talk time
- Pause for processing
- Can do attitude

## Does my child need a formal Assessment?

This is one of our most frequently asked questions. The short answer is: No – the most important thing is that either you or the teacher has noticed that your child is not progressing as you would expect.

*Dyslexia is a learning preference and therefore strategies that help dyslexic children should be implemented as soon as possible.*

An assessment is no longer required for NCEA accommodations, the school can apply for these on the child's behalf by using supportive evidence from their records.

### **Some examples of supportive evidence might be:**

- A free screening test carried out by the school or parent – there are free tests available online.
- Evidence of literacy and/or numeracy not progressing at expected standards
- Observations of child – progressing better in calm and stress free environments, or excelling in creative or out of classroom pursuits
- Does the child perform better when offered alternative forms of assessment than written form.

If you suspect your child has other learning differences alongside dyslexia, a formal assessment can be useful for identifying other neurodiversities such as ADHD, ASD etc.





## Reading and phonics

Magic bullets are highly sought after but often fail to perform to expectations. This is the case with reading accuracy, which for many years has been a preferred academic response to dyslexia – based on the idea that if we can teach children to read accurately through the use of phonics, then the ‘problem’ of dyslexia will disappear.

This, however, overlooks the fact that dyslexia is not simply an issue with reading and writing skills. Rather it’s a learning preference which can bring a broad spectrum of difference – from enhanced creativity and ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking through to issues with auditory and information processing, planning and organising, motor skills, short-term memory and concentration. Difficulties with basic skills are merely symptoms of dyslexia, so any magic bullet which hoped to ‘cure’ basic skill difficulties would need to be aimed at the root cause of these symptoms: a brain that is wired differently.

In essence, dyslexia thinkers receive and retrieve information in a different part of the brain to neurotypical, word-based thinkers. They tend to think in pictures rather than words. And often prefer to receive and present orally or visually rather than via the written word.

The DFNZ supports a Structured Literacy Approach to teaching reading, such as the Better Start Literacy Approach from Canterbury University. Find out more at [www.betterstartapproach.com](http://www.betterstartapproach.com)

Overall, it is important to understand dyslexia as a learning preference and work with, and support, students from this preference perspective. Put simply, this means understanding that dyslexics think differently, and so naturally prefer to receive, process and present information in the way that makes more sense to them.

If your child has been taught reading using a Structured Literacy Approach and they are not making sufficient progress, it is worth investigating other multi-sensory and meaning based approaches, along with adopting a Notice and Adjust strategy. ‘Notice and adjust’ is about implementing personalised and individual learning strategies based on noticing what is not working and making simple changes, for example using visuals, colour and real objects as props through to reducing classroom noise and distractions. You can read more at <https://dfnz.org.nz/new/education/>

## Working with your school

In most instances, parents and schools can work together to find solutions for children with learning differences.

If you are worried about your child's learning or the school has alerted you to a concern, the first thing to do is to organise a meeting with your child's teacher. Take your partner or a support person if necessary so they can assist with writing down answers to your questions and what has been said.



MAKE YOUR  
VOICE HEARD!



## Questions to ask your school

In the first instance many schools will try to respond to a lack of progress by asking the class teacher to do things differently in the classroom. This is a perfectly acceptable response but it is important to get answers to the following questions:

- How will the teacher do things differently?
- How long will it be before we know if it is working?
- How will we know if it is working?
- What will you do if it is not working?
- Please can we set a date (within the current school term) to review progress?

If the school suggests that extra support outside the classroom is needed, important questions to ask include:

- What extra support will my child get?
- Where will it take place?
- Who will be doing it?
- When can we discuss targets for progress?
- How has my child been involved in setting these targets?

- Does my child understand these targets?
- How has my child's class teacher been involved in setting these targets?
- How is my child's teacher/s going to meet these targets in all subjects/in every lesson?
- How long will it be before these targets are met?
- What will happen if my child cannot meet these targets?

Sometimes a child still fails to make progress, despite good teaching and extra input from the school. Helpful questions to ask at this stage include:

- Will my child be assessed?
- If so, who will do it and when will it be done?
- When will I be invited to a meeting to discuss the results of any assessment?
- What will happen next?
- What will happen if there is still no progress?

RECOGNISING AND HARNESSING TALENTS  
AND CREATIVE STRENGTHS

## NCEA AND Exam Accommodations

Tests, assessments, and NCEA exams are a fact of school life and a ticket to opportunities beyond the classroom. They are stressful for many, but dyslexic students can be at a distinct disadvantage if basic skills, including accurate spelling and fluent reading, hold them back.

In NCEA exams the playing field must be levelled. This is done by way of special assessment conditions and they come in the form of extra time, use of a computer, a reader / writer, or a less distracting room, to name the most common. Secondary schools are legally required to identify students who qualify for these, accumulate evidence to support this view, and apply to the NZ Qualifications Authority to have the appropriate assessment condition [or any combination] put in place.

IT'S NOT  
ROCKET SCIENCE!






**Dyslexia Foundation**  
of New Zealand

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Recognition • Understanding • Action

For additional support in any of these areas, please  
feel free to contact DFNZ at [info@dfnz.org.nz](mailto:info@dfnz.org.nz)

[www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz](http://www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz)

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