

Dyslexia and Mental Health Fact Sheet

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“The vast majority of children with learning disabilities have some emotional problem associated with the learning difficulty”

"Understanding Children's Hearts and Minds: Emotional Functioning and Learning Disabilities." **Understanding Children's Hearts and Minds: Emotional Functioning and Learning Disabilities** | LD Topics | LD OnLine. Web. 31 Mar. 2017.

"..research indicates that as many as 20 percent of children with dyslexia also suffer from depression and another 20 percent suffer from an anxiety disorder (Willcutt, and Gaffney-Brown 2004)." "Social and Emotional Problems Related to Dyslexia." Social and Emotional Problems Related to Dyslexia | LD Topics | LD OnLine. Web. 15 Feb. 2017.

"Research has shown that individuals with learning disabilities:

- may experience increased levels of anxiety.
- may be at greater risk for depression.
- experience higher levels of loneliness.
- may have a lower self-concept (self-esteem).
- are at greater risk for substance abuse.
- may be at greater risk for juvenile delinquency."

By: GreatSchools Staff | March 18, 2016 Print Article. "Learning Disabilities and Psychological Problems: An Overview." Parenting. Web. 31 Mar. 2017.

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Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness is a conditioned response to continual failure that creates cognitive, motivational, and emotional deficits in children.

They have learnt through failure that there is no point trying. Students develop self-defeating strategies that impact on their ability to learn.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal human response to situations of stress. It is a flight or fight response to a fearful situation. If anxiety becomes out of control and starts to impact on daily life the anxiety becomes a mental health disorder.

Children with dyslexia are under a great deal of stress. Students with dyslexia must face daily tasks that they find extremely difficult.

When anxiety is experienced it is common to avoid the situation as a protective response. Avoidance behaviour can be interpreted as laziness or misbehaviour and may result in school refusal and learned helplessness.

Anxiety Symptoms

Avoidance of school work, school absenteeism.

Panic attacks, increased heart rate, increased breathing rate, tense muscles, nervousness, fatigue, headaches, vomiting, upset stomach.

Self Esteem

A child with dyslexia is constantly confronted with situations of failure and frustration in the school setting. When mastery of skills falls short of peers then it can have a significant impact on self esteem.

Depression

"Depression is also a frequent complication of dyslexia. Children with this kind of learning disability are at higher risk for intense feelings of sorrow and pain. Perhaps because of their low self-esteem, dyslexics are afraid to turn their anger toward their environment and

instead turn it toward themselves. The depressed dyslexic not only experiences great pain in his present experiences, but also foresees a life of continuing failure." *Ryan and International Dyslexia Association*

"Research conducted by Dr. Kenneth Kavale of the University of Iowa and Dr. Steven R. Forness of the University of California at Los Angeles indicates that as many as 70% of children with learning difficulties suffer from poor self-esteem." By: GreatSchools Staff | March 18, 2016 Print Article. "Learning Disabilities and Psychological Problems: An Overview." Parenting. Web. 31 Mar. 2017.

Strategies for promoting learned optimism

Intrinsic motivation refers to behaviour that is motivated by internal rewards. Extrinsic motivation involves engaging in a behaviour in order to earn a reward or avoid punishments.

"The cure for learned helplessness is not the rediscovery of positive thinking. It does not consist in just learning to say positive things to yourself. What is crucial is what you think, changing the destructive things you say to yourself when you fail or have setbacks and making these statements a part of your explanatory style." Gordon, Robert, and Myrna Gordon. *The Turned-off Child: Learned Helplessness and School Failure*. Salt Lake City, UT: American Book Pub., 2006. Print.

Strategies to minimise stress

- Coping cards- coping cards are a set of small cards or a little booklet with strategies for the student to control their anxiety. These should be designed in conjunction with the student. For younger students a pictorial reference can be added. When a student is experiencing stress it is difficult for them to remember or initiate their strategies.
- Belly or deep breathing- control of breath is a well recognised strategy for controlling anxiety and stress. Encourage deep slow breaths.
- Muscle relaxation
- Mindfulness- mindfulness is a form of self awareness meditation adapted from Buddhism into Western medicine.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is a psychologist guided therapy used in the treatment of depression, anxiety learned helplessness and self esteem. The goal of CBT is typically to change automatic unhelpful or negative thought patterns and replace them with a more positive thought process. CBT has been practised widely for more than 30 years. It has been researched extensively, and has demonstrated effectiveness with a variety of emotional psychological and psychiatric difficulties.

Extrinsic motivation ,when used appropriately, can encourage reluctant students and enable positive associations to be made with school work.

Praise:

Effort
Strategy
Focus
Improvement

Promote:

Autonomy- having control over a task.
Competence- feeling that you can succeed.
Relatedness- care and respect and connection.
Relevance- school work needs to be engaging.

ALWAYS SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP AND ADVICE IF CONCERNED ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

- Start with your GP and school counsellor.
- Children can be very good at hiding their mental health issues and may be suffering to a greater extent than you realise.
- Mental health problems may be exhibited in an array of coping mechanisms such as anger, obsessive behaviours, defiant behaviour, and avoidance behaviour.

"**headspace** is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25 year olds, along with assistance in promoting young peoples' wellbeing. " *Headspace*

"The **BRAVE** Program is an interactive, online program for the prevention and treatment of childhood and adolescent anxiety. The programs are free, and provide ways for children

and teenagers to better cope with their worries. There are also programs for parents." *The BRAVE program*

Make an appointment to see your GP for one of 2 options

Mental Health Plan gives you access to a psychologist of your choice and the GP can refer you to a psychologist to meet your needs. Medicare rebate will cover less than half the cost depending on the fees.

Access to Allied Psychological Services (**ATAPS**) enables GPs to refer to specific psychologist for limited free sessions.

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