

# Starting School with Dyslexia

It's the start of a new year! So it's time to get ready and organised for school, not just school books, stationery, clothes and shoes but the important things that will make a BIG difference to your child's school education. Here is a to-do-list to make the year a little easier, and more importantly a happy one for both you and your child with Dyslexia:

1. Make an appointment to see your child's teacher within the first couple of weeks of school:
  - a. In **Primary School**, during the meeting, discuss your child's Dyslexia or/& any other Learning Difficulties. Make it clear that you want to be kept informed of their progress or any difficulties that they encounter. Be friendly and courteous, your child's teacher is going to be their mentor for the year and you want to harbor a good relationship and keep the lines of communication open. Write a list of your child's needs, include for example, adjustments (extra time for exams, audio books, electronic devices etc). If your child doesn't already have an Individual Learning Plan then it's time to arrange one. Remind your child's teacher that these adjustments (accommodations & provisions) provide your child with a 'level playing field' not an advantage.
  - b. **High School** is a little more challenging, as your child will have a different teacher for each subject. Ideally the Teacher(s) responsible for Learning Support should provide each class teacher with a copy of your child's Individual Learning Plan including information about your child's Learning Difficulties, required support, adjustments etc. However it wouldn't hurt to request a list of your child's teachers for the year (or semester) and send each a quick email, introducing yourself and outlining once again your desire to be kept informed and provide any additional information that may be helpful, such as list of reasonable adjustments (accommodations) assistive technology and requesting they provide your child with handouts of information covered in each class or allow your child to take photos of the Whiteboard instead of copying from the board.

2. Make sure your child has a current Individual Learning Plan (ILP). This is imperative for any chance of success. The ILP should outline your child's Learning Difficulty, including any necessary additional support and all agreed reasonable adjustments/provisions (including, scribes, extra-time, readers, assistive technology etc). This is a working document that guides the teacher on teaching practices that are necessary for your child. It should be reviewed at a minimum each year and should be constructed with the parent input, and where appropriate, student, allied health &/or education professional input.
  
3. Keep an eye on your child's homework and assignments:
  - a. In **Primary School**, there may be set or no set homework &/or assignments. It depends on the school. Your child will require guidance with their homework but please try not to fall into the trap of doing their homework for them. It may be difficult, as you will most likely experience tears and tantrums, however you are not helping them by doing it for them. Your child needs to learn to do their own work. If they can't achieve it, then their teacher needs to know. This advice also applies in **High School**.
  
  - b. Time management is vital in **High School**. Make sure your child has a time management plan for doing their homework and assignments. Leaving it to the last minute is never a good idea. Guide your child to break the assignment work down into manageable chunks. Doing a bit each day is much easier than rushing to put it all together the weekend before it's due. It will also help to reduce stress and anxiety, leading up to the due date.
  
  - c. Use resources such as Mind Maps to help gather ideas on paper. You don't need fancy programs to do these, but do a bit of research so you know how to use them productively. Don't forget to also use any assistive technology that may be available to your child, such as Reading programs, audio books, C-Pens, built-in technology on tablets or laptops etc.
  
4. If you have implemented all of the above and your child is still struggling or not coping, then it's time to seek further assistance. First discuss the issues with your child's teacher. If that does not resolve the issue, then make an appointment to speak with the school Principal. At times it's also very important to include in this

meeting the class teacher, the school counsellor and the Learning Support Teacher. If the problem is bigger than the school can handle or they do not appear to understand your concerns, then do not hesitate to contact your State/Territory Department of Education for further support. There should be a Learning Support Team who can help and guide the school to implement the correct support for your child.

5. Do not be afraid to advocate for your child. But also teach your child to advocate for themselves. Educate yourself about Dyslexia and provide your child with the necessary knowledge about what they should and shouldn't expect from their school, in regards to support and adjustments. Give your child the tools to recognise and stand up for themselves when they do not receive the support they require. Resilience is also essential, to have the ability to bounce back when things don't go to plan, as this will happen throughout life. If you need more assistance with resilience or anxiety, do not hesitate to get further assistance from the school counsellor or from another qualified individual, such as a psychologist.
  
6. Many parents also choose (when affordable) to access external support, such as tutoring. This can help tremendously if you choose the correct provider. When considering a tutor, please make sure they use an evidence-based approach and instruction, have the requisite teaching qualifications and a current working with vulnerable people card. Remember Dyslexia is a language based neurological condition and all good interventions according to Dr Joanne Pierson – “should be research-based, multisensory, individualised, systematic, direct, and explicit. It should incorporate all aspects of spoken and written language—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It should target phonology (i.e., the sound system of our language), sound-symbol (letter) correspondences, orthographic knowledge and awareness, syllable instruction, morphology (e.g., base words, inflectional endings (past tense, third person, and plural suffixes), Greek and Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes), semantics (i.e., word meanings), and syntax (i.e., word order). And, it should be cumulative—it should build on underlying skills over time.” - <http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/answers/ask-dr-pierson/vision-therapy-for-dyslexia-smoke-and-mirrors>)
  
7. Finally, do not place excessive expectations on your child's academic results. It is far more important to focus on their effort, not academic achievement.

This information has been updated but was originally published by Dyslexia Information for the Canberra Region in 2016: <https://www.facebook.com/dyslexiacanberra>

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